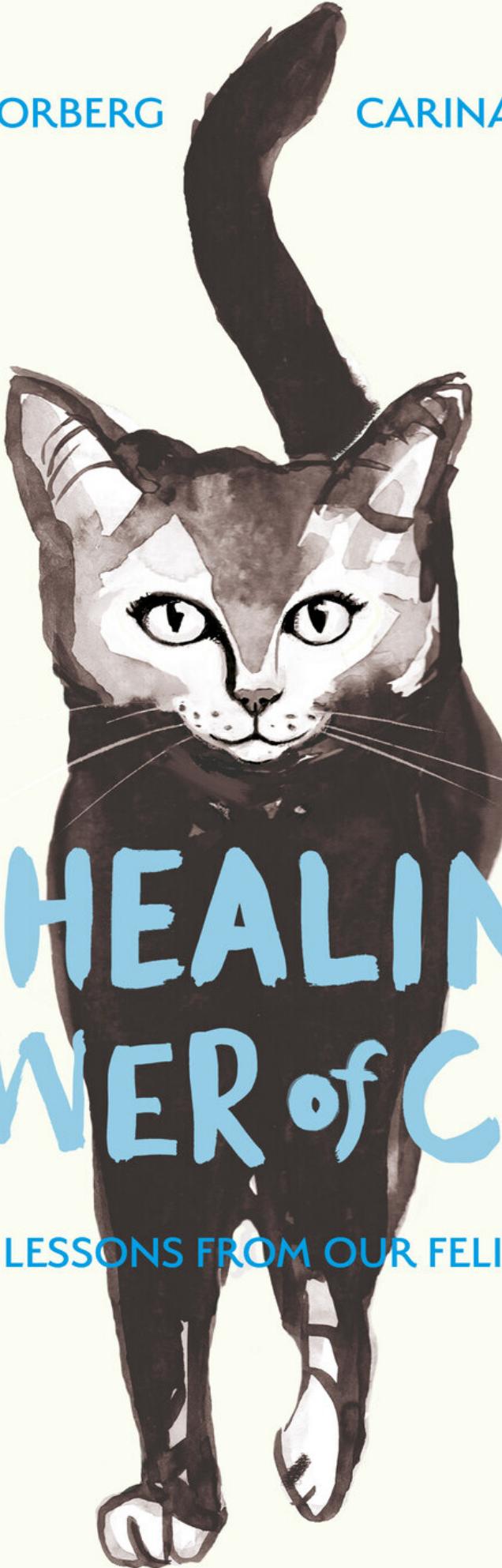


ULRICA NORBERG

CARINA NUNSTEDT



# The HEALING POWER of CATS

NINE LIFE LESSONS FROM OUR FELINE FRIENDS

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# The HEALING POWER of CATS



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*To all cool cats*

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# **FOREWORD**

## **Cats as Teachers**

There are many powerful stories about cats and what they mean to us. Humans have regarded cats as teachers for a very long time. In ancient Egypt, cats were thought to be divine beings with exalted properties. The Egyptians and the Celts both used cats at funerals, to assist the soul in moving on and to lend comfort to those in mourning.

In the old Norse faith of the Iron Age, cats also enjoyed a prominent position. The Vikings brought them along on their ships to keep away vermin. They have also put in long and faithful service as creative and meditative company for artists, writers, and politicians.

Cats are curious animals with keen senses. They communicate their needs instinctively and set clear boundaries. In a world of rapid change and constant upheavals, cats represent the opposite. They follow distinctive rhythms and stick to the beats of their own hearts. These qualities have become more important than ever for us humans to cultivate.

Just being around a cat can alleviate stress and anxiety, according to the research we've looked at. Purring, another unique ability of felines, can help lower blood pressure and decrease the risk of cardiovascular issues, in both cats and humans.

In more recent years, an increasing number of studies of cats have been carried out and, while working on this book, we've had the privilege of meeting some prominent cat researchers from around the globe.

We have also met celebrity and non-celebrity cat owners and will be sharing their powerful cat stories, as well as our own. Being two passionate, health-conscious journalists and writers, we are further united by our love of cats and the impact they have on humans. You'll get to meet our own family members: Bore the Birman, Clea the Bengal (Ulrica's), and the Siberian siblings Mia and Magnum (Carina's). We've both seen loved ones go through long, difficult health struggles, and we've both seen first-hand how cats can soothe and heal us. We're fascinated by their ability to balance the good and the bad in life.

Some might think of us as ‘crazy cat ladies’, because of how much we like to speak of and to our cats. However, we prefer to think of ourselves as ‘clever cat ladies’. You see, we believe that by taking guidance from the cat’s useful healing properties and spiritual essence, we can learn to respect our own boundaries, enjoy things more, reflect, clear things out, make room for play and fun, and achieve a more sustainable life rhythm.

The cat’s way will help you lead a wiser life, with better balance and guaranteed good vibes. Harness the lifeforce of cats and embody Cat Power!

Ulrica and Carina

### A FEW FACTS ABOUT OUR CATS

What are the most popular cat breeds?<sup>1</sup>

1. Ragdoll
2. Siberian
3. Maine Coon
4. Norwegian Forest Cat
5. Birman
6. British Shorthair
7. Bengal
8. Devon Rex
9. Persian

- There are more than 370 million domestic cats in the world, and estimates suggest that the number of those living in the wild is at least equal. By comparison there are approximately 470 million dogs<sup>2</sup>. However, in most western countries, cats are the most common pets.
- Sweden has almost 1.5 million domestic cats, and 934,000 dogs<sup>3</sup>. Nineteen per cent of Swedish households have a cat.
- The USA has the most domestic cats in the world, followed by China and Russia. One in three American

households has at least one cat (many have two) and in total there are about 100 million domestic cats there (according to Statista). That means the number has tripled over the last forty years.

- In the EU, Germany tops the cat charts with 14.5 million cats, meaning almost one household in four has a cat. France has more than 13.5 million cats, Italy has 7.5 million, and Great Britain has at least the same number as Italy. And remember, we're only counting domestic cats here.
- Turkey has more than 4.1 million cats. The largest city, Istanbul, is also nicknamed 'City of Cats', or even 'Catstanbul', and is home to hundreds of thousands of cats. The inhabitants love their kitties, and the streets are lined with food and water bowls left out to make sure the cats need never thirst or hunger.
- In Spain, Portugal, Ireland, South Africa, and large parts of Asia, dogs are the more common pet option; India, for example, is very much a dog country.

1. Source: Agria animal insurance, 2021.

2. Source: World Atlas 2018: only pets counted, no wild dogs.

3. According to a pet ownership survey carried out by Novus for Agria and Svenska Kennelklubben, April 2021.



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# CARINA

## When the Cat Flap Reopened



*For almost twenty years I didn't have a cat in my life, and I missed having one badly. I had chosen a man who was allergic to cats. I was never able to argue with that fact. Instead, I had to close the door on a section of my heart, to a space inside of me that had always been filled with a wonderful, warm, humming sound.*

*Growing up, we had Maja, who was white as snow. When she ran away and was later found after being run over by a car, I had nightmares all summer long. Then my mother got us Missen, a brown and white farm cat who was as peaceful as can be. During my teens, when the arguments in my home were at their worst, Missen was there to dispel the bad moods. I argued with my mom's husband, Mogens, about everything. I was angry because I felt that he treated my mom very poorly. He didn't listen to her. He didn't take good enough care of her when she went through spells of poor health. The fact that he hated cats didn't do much to improve the situation, but Missen didn't care about that. She decided to snuggle up into Mogens's lap every night anyway, whenever he would plant himself on our brown corduroy couch to watch the news.*

*She never apologised, and I think he slowly developed a certain fondness for her. At first, he would simply push her down to the floor but eventually he gave up. Capitulated. He let her lie there, purring. Missen became our mediator. When she was in Mogens's lap, a sense of calm finally came over our family. But I never saw him pet her; not even once.*

*A while ago, my mother found a print of a photograph from twenty years ago, in which our adorable cat is sitting on top of my pregnant belly as I catch my breath on the couch of our summer house on Österlen. It's a*

*beautiful picture. Missen welcomed my first child, Wilmer, to the world. A couple of years later she was buried in the garden, behind the summer house where the photograph was taken.*

*When Missen died, she left a void.*

*I went on to have a wonderful family: my husband, Anders, and our two amazing sons, Wilmer and Oscar. However, we never even discussed having a cat, because of Anders' allergy. When we visited my sister, who had two cats, he would sneeze, his eyes would get itchy, and he would have to go outside for some fresh air.*

*We considered getting a hairless cat, but it just wouldn't be the same without fur. That was a deal breaker for me. Instead, I toughed it out and kept my cat flap closed.*

*My dream was to have a Norwegian forest cat and from time to time I would browse some pics and cute cat videos to comfort myself a little. But I had so much other stuff on my mind with sick kids, and lots of work. Besides, who would take care of our cat when we were away travelling?*

*When Ulrica suggested we run a trial and borrow her Birman Bore, who was supposed to be tolerable for people with allergies, hope awakened within me. Fluffy, soft, and gorgeous, Bore immediately softened our teenage sons' voices. We were crossing our fingers so hard, hoping we would be able to get our own. However, after four or five hours, Anders's eyes began to water.*

*The cat flap closed.*

*In the summer of 2018, Anders was diagnosed with cancer, and our life and our everyday routines were completely upended. All of our energy was spent getting prepared for the next round of chemotherapy, the next doctor's visit, the next operation, the next hospital appointment and all the ambulance rides. We were quite the team and our love could conquer anything, we thought. And, well, it did conquer a whole lot of stuff. But when Anders went into remission for the third time, just as the pandemic struck, it felt as though things couldn't possibly get any worse. Anders isolated himself at our country house.*

*One day, in May, he asked me, unexpectedly, 'How about we get a cat?'*

*I was lost for words.*

*'I've been reading about this breed of cat that's supposed to be particularly allergy-friendly. Siberian.'*

*'Really? You've been googling cats?'*

*‘Well, I didn’t have anything better to do. And I thought it could be nice.’*

*‘So you’re serious then? This isn’t just a joke to me. What if you become allergic?’*

*‘We could give it a go.’*

*And so, Anders sent me a link, and I began to gather all the information I could find about this breed of cat that was supposedly the most allergy-friendly of all. It was also, supposedly, a breed that displayed dog-like behaviour. A proper family cat.*

*How on earth could we have missed it until now?*

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# ULRICA

## Napoleon the Life Saver



*During my teens I had a boyfriend (let's call him X), who abused me both physically and psychologically. I never dared tell anybody about it because he had told me I would regret it if I did.*

*It was my last year of secondary school and I was becoming increasingly isolated and withdrawn. I often turned down invitations to parties and social events as I felt that I had to negotiate with X over which friends I ought to be spending time with. He would often go into a violent rage if he found out I'd spent time with somebody he hadn't approved of ahead of time. He would call me in the middle of the night, drunk, and sometimes he would pound on my door, or stand outside my window yelling until I let him in. Often, he would calm down once he got inside, but I did have to call the police a couple of times. When he sobered up, he would always be remorseful, showering me with tears, gifts, and promises that it would never happen again.*

*My cat, Napoleon, or Nappe as I always called him, was always there with his cosy snout and his magical purring. The way he purred reminded me of classical music. I would often lie in bed, talking to him, opening my heart to him, and weeping into his fur. He seemed to understand.*

*Nappe was a large, red-pointed male, and he had a wonderful personality. Nobody could sit as proudly or snuggle as sincerely as he could. He also made it very plain that he didn't think much of my boyfriend. Every time X would visit Napoleon would sit with his back to him, demonstratively, and refuse to be petted.*

*One evening, when X was at my place, he left a jumper on my patio after we drank some coffee there. The next morning when I woke up, I found*

*Napoleon by a flower bed in my garden. He had dragged the jumper all the way there. And peed on it.*

*When my best friend came to visit, she laughed out loud when I told her what Nappe had done. ‘You’ll have to ditch that loser, now, surely?’ she insisted.*

*Thanks to the support of my friend and the support of Napoleon, I took the first step and reached out for help. Napoleon barely left my side over the next few days. It was as though he sensed that the energy within me had shifted, and that I needed all the support I could get in order to get X out of my life.*

*With my good friends and my Napoleon by my side, I found the strength I needed to get through the breakup. This amazing, wise, and brave cat helped me understand the importance of taking care of myself and fighting for my right to happiness.*

*He also taught me that it’s important to flash my claws when necessary.*

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# CHAPTER 1

## NINE LIVES

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*A cat has nine lives. For three he plays, for three he strays and for the last three he stays.*

Old English saying

The legend of the ancient Egyptian sun deity Atum-Ram tells of how they (Ra is an androgynous deity) took the form of a cat. Ra could replicate life, and gave birth to eight other gods in order to make them (Ra) feel complete. ‘Nine lives in one’ became a symbol of the fact that the essence of a living being can take several forms.

Furthermore, in China, the number nine is considered lucky. In Chinese culture cats signify purity and good fortune. Nine is also often referred to as a ‘trinity of trinities’ within various spiritual traditions, as the divine is said to express itself through the idea of three times three.

In numerology nine symbolises completion rather than definiteness. It represents the most complete, the optimal and the cyclical, reminding us of how all life goes through processes, and that energy can be transformed. The end of one cycle is the beginning of the next.

The number nine is also said to unite the world of animals and the world of human beings. Cats are powerful animals – spirit animals – which use their many strengths to help humanity better understand ourselves, and life in general.

The notion that cats have a unique ability to survive is alive and well in several cultures, as is the myth of a cat’s nine lives. In Spain the number of lives is thought to be seven, and in Turkish and Arabic cultures the number is six – but in any case, most people agree that cats are particularly durable and inventive animals, who tackle life’s challenges better than many other species.

The rich set of abilities possessed by cats make them one of the most exciting of all animal species. Here are nine of the superpowers that cats have:

## 1: Integrity

Cats don't apologise. They go their own way, listen to their own needs, value the present, and prioritise the things that interest them.

Cats are intuitive, and masterful when it comes to detecting moods. They signal their boundaries either by walking off, or even by scratching, hissing, or growling. One second they might want to be left in peace and crawl away, only to climb onto your lap or keyboard the next, wanting a snuggle. Sometimes it can seem as though they can tell that we need them – before we even know it ourselves! When that happens, they offer us a paw, as if to say, *I'm here. Now is a good time. I need you now. You need me.*

Their integrity gives them the courage to listen inwards and trust their intuition. This inner security inspires us to pause and reflect on our own purpose in life, and how we might better understand our own internal needs.

It's not easy to strike a balance between being attentive to others and setting appropriate boundaries for yourself, and we've all struggled with this at times.

## 2: Strength

The great integrity of cats is complemented by their hunters' instincts. Cats are master survivors, predators with limber physiques, quick reflexes and keen eyesight, allowing them to evade danger and capture their prey with ease.

To stay healthy, cats need a variety of stimuli, which is why they play at hunting and curiously explore their environments in new ways each day – it all trains their mental balance and their physical strength. They also need social stimulation on a daily basis, which explains why they sometimes intrude on our everyday activities to initiate play or other interactions.

Cats even show us humans how to improve our physical health through play by stretching, interval running, sneaking, tumbling, and active rest. However, they also tend to their mental health, as evidenced by the dignity they display when they flash their claws, hiss, or arch their backs.

## 3: Focus

Cats have an amazing ability to focus and balance their senses. They can zoom in on what's happening in the moment and let go of anything that doesn't matter. They have good hearing and an acute sense of touch, they can see in the dark, they can see ultraviolet light, and they don't appear to fear murky, dark, or invisible things. It's as though cats are able to see through several dimensions, including into their own souls, and this ability helps them understand your soul. Cats like to climb to high places. However, cats aren't the only ones who feel safe and content when overlooking their surroundings, as many of us feel better when we're taking in a good view of some mountains or an ocean. Cats, like people, enjoy places where the mind can run free making it easier to gain perspective on life.

In our busy everyday lives, it can be difficult to budget time and prioritise wisely.

Having a clear, strong focus can grant you a sense of freedom and calm.

## 4: Agility

Who wouldn't want to be as agile as a cat? Their elegance, grace, and precision ensure that they always carefully plant one foot in front of the other. It's easy to see why many yoga practitioners feel some kind of kinship with the cat. Several spiritual traditions view cats as more closely connected to life and to a higher consciousness, something that yoga experts claim is due to the daily agility training all cats undergo. Cats have a highly elastic spine with fifty-three vertebrae (human beings have thirty-three), and very mobile joints, because of the way they use their whole body in every move they make. They sneak, jump, roll, climb, hang, stretch, mew, yawn, hiss, talk, and meditate. They also sleep most of the time. This rhythmic interplay lays the foundation for cats' incredible agility.

## 5: Contentment

A cat lying in the sun is a very peaceful sight. Inviting. Cats are comfortable with themselves and practice the purest form of mindfulness. One second

they might be curled up into a ball on the softest spot on the couch and the next moment they might be prancing along on their own private catwalk. You can almost hear them say: *What of it? Why wouldn't I be lying/walking here?* They take every opportunity to enjoy life to the fullest, sitting with enviable posture, like statues, with lush fur and wise eyes, savouring life in the here and now.

Cats are masters of the art of indulgence, and they don't mind being close to people, just as they don't mind heading off to ensure they will get some space.

The vibrations of purring cats triggers the release of the happiness and pleasure hormone oxytocin, in both cats and humans. A sense of harmony is produced.

## 6: Cleanliness

Cats have incredibly good hygiene, and they spend three to four hours cleaning themselves each day. A cat that's in good health will groom its fur every day, to keep it free of dirt, dust, and parasites. The intense cleaning work they do with their rough tongues also stimulates glands in their skin, which respond by secreting a substance that keeps the fur waterproof, warm in cold weather, and cooler when it's warm out. Cats love newly cleaned surfaces and like to jump into bed while you're changing the sheets. They very much enjoy resting on top of clean laundry, or even the drying rack.

Their cleansing ritual is also a social act, as cats prefer to clean themselves among members of their family.

The diligence with which cats pursue cleanliness is something all humans would do well to emulate. Good hygiene makes you less vulnerable to infection. The massage we give ourselves when we rub ourselves down is good for our skin, bathing keeps the skin healthy, and cleaning and tidying your home is soothing for the soul.

## 7: Sensitivity

Cats' quick reflexes largely stem from their incredibly sensitive senses. Their nervous systems are highly developed, and they can hear sounds from

far away as well as perceive very low-frequency sounds. Their whiskers are sensory organs which serve as receptors, giving the cat a better awareness of its surroundings.

They register the flow of air around them and are connected to lots of nerves that pick up information. This sensitivity makes them alert and present in the moment, which is beneficial to their survival, their viability as organisms, and their ability to adapt. The ways that cats take in their surroundings can teach us humans the value of being fully present in the moment and taking our emotions seriously.

## 8: Playfulness

A cat that gets to play and explore is a happy, healthy cat. Cats have adventurous natures, heading out on quests to discover the world, and have been doing so for at least ten thousand years.

When cats get to live in homes where they receive stimulation, they will have the confidence to move as they want to. Cats can hear the notes in the rhythm of life. Perhaps it's struck you that you laugh a lot more when there is a cat in your home? Their somersaults, explorations of their own tails, and the way they play with balls, bells, and string are highly invigorating and entertaining to watch. Living and spending time with a cat is an opportunity to experience more laughter, more play, and more of that joyous feeling of being fully alive inside your body.

## 9: Recovery

One of the greatest challenges we face in our modern, performance-fixated society is to learn to prioritise recovery. Some new activity almost always seems more important. Taking a siesta every day ought to be completely natural in all cultures, not just in the Mediterranean ones.

A cat will sleep and rest for sixteen to eighteen hours each day. Humans don't need to spend that much time on their recovery but we do need regular breaks, as well as the six or seven hours most of us sleep each night. Research has shown that people who prioritise sleep experience less stress-related problems, and that sleep also plays a role in physical healing, as well

as reinforcing mental health. The people who keep close to their cats, and get more rest in their everyday lives, might improve their quality of sleep in the long term and thus see their stress levels go down. This is just one of the many healing powers your cat is blessed with.

This arsenal of positive properties can help you reach far in life.

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# CHAPTER 2

## HAPPY CAT

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*I have a lucky cat in my arms, it spins<sup>1</sup> a happy thread... Lucky cat,  
lucky cat, purr me more about my future!*

from *Poems* by Edith Södergran

The striped tail slopes beautifully towards the skirt. She's holding the cat close to her face, almost as though she were carrying a child, and flashing a huge smile. Her eyes express absolute harmony.

To anybody who owns a cat, it's easy to recognise the joy that Edith Södergran is expressing in this photograph, which depicts her with her stripy cat Totti in her arms. Cats were one of the most beloved subjects of the poet Edith Södergran. She was only twenty-four years old when she wrote the poem 'Happy Cat' in 1916. It became one of her most famous poems before she passed away, far too early at thirty-one, after a prolonged struggle with tuberculosis. The future that her happy cat purred to her was far too short, but the joy her poetry brought to the world lives on today, more than a century later.

Cat owners are said to be happier than people who don't have cats. An Australian study showed that people who have cats feel more confident and less anxious, sleep and focus better, and tackle life's challenges better.

Having a cat can bring out more of your favourite emotions. You don't even need to hug it or hear it purr to feel better. Just having a cat close by can reduce negative emotions and make you less depressed, afraid, introverted, or prone to anxiety. The effects appear to be stronger in women than in men. This was documented in an extensive study that was carried out by ethologist Gerulf Reider in close collaboration with Dennis C. Turner at the Institute of Zoology in Zürich – a discovery that won a great deal of global attention when it was published in 2003.

## A STUDY IN CAT

On a cold day in February, full of anticipation, we connect with Zürich in Switzerland for a zoom conversation with Dennis C. Turner, the most famous cat researcher in the world today. We meet a man in a blue and white checked shirt, with a trim goatee and a pair of energetic blue eyes behind his brown spectacles.

The paintings and framed diplomas on the walls suggest he's had a long and successful career, and he proudly points to the cabinets where he keeps more than 5,500 studies on cats and other pets, all of which he either worked on or has read carefully over the years. The happiness he feels when he talks about his favourite subject is palpable.

For more than thirty years, he and a large team of master's students and assistants have been studying the ways that cats interact socially with us humans. He's been a cat owner for even longer than that, with never fewer than two when he lived in the country, and he always let them come and go as they pleased. Seven years ago when his last cat Joy passed away, just after they moved to a third-floor flat in a senior apartment building on one of the busier streets in Zürich, they decided that they wouldn't be getting a new cat.

'I miss them so much. It's so wonderful to come home from work and be met by your cats, walking around with their tails in the air.'

Turner's work all revolves around a common thesis: cats cheer us up. Their presence washes away unnecessary negative emotions and you can even see them literally shake off the past.

The more time you spend with your cat, the greater benefits you will reap from the relationship. So, you shouldn't underestimate the value of playing and hanging out with your cat every day. Invest the time to find out what it likes and what catches its interest, and you'll both find your interactions more rewarding. If a cat has caused an imbalance between family members, Dennis suggests having whoever has the weakest connection with the cat be the one who feeds it for a couple of weeks. Just like humans, cats have an easier time forming a loving bond with somebody who puts time and love into preparing their food.

'If you feed the cat, it will interact with you. Since women are usually the ones who fill the food bowls, they tend to be cats' first choices as interaction partners.' Other studies have shown that cats choose men just as often as women or children. This was determined after having the

participants in the study sit down to read a book, and then letting the cat choose who to approach.

Women and children of all ages tended to stoop down to the floor when they approached the cat, to be on the same level, while men were more likely to interact with the cat from a seated position, on the couch or armchair. Or they might pick them up.

‘Cats don’t always like that. Some children, boys especially, chose to run up to the cat, which is something all cats seem to dislike. When I teach animal therapy, I always say to tell the children not to run up, but to sit down quietly to read, or do something else. Then, the cat will come to them.’

The beneficial powers of cats are well known in many cultures, both in scientific terms and in spiritual ones. In ancient Egypt, where the domestication of cats originated, the cat was held to be a divine being, and a bringer of luck and good fortune. It would even join the family in their grave.

In the Middle and Far East, cats have enjoyed great respect. According to research, cats are afforded special status in Islam, which teaches that they are holy and clean animals. Being close to a cat is said to be a sign of great faith. The prophet Mohammed’s favourite cat, Muezza, was a black-and-white Abyssinian, and one of the things he admired about it was the way it always landed on its feet.

## MANEKI-NEKO

Most of you will have seen them: the mass-produced, waving cats that supposedly bring good luck and are available for purchase in any well-stocked Asian shop. In Japanese they are referred to as maneki-neko and are said to bring a little good fortune to their owners each time they wave their left paws.

Most Japanese historians agree the good luck cat first appeared during the Edo period (1603–1868). Legend has it that a rich man was once caught out by an unexpected rainstorm and sought shelter under a tree near a temple. He caught sight of a cat that seemed to be waving to him and decided to follow it into the temple. Soon afterwards lightning struck the tree where he had been standing. The cat had saved his life. Overwhelmed

with gratitude, the man decided to make a donation to the temple, and when he died, a statue of him was raised there.

Another, less wholesome maneki-neko legend tells of a geisha who had a cat that she loved more than the world. One day the cat started chewing at her kimono, and the brothel-keeper decided the cat must be possessed by evil spirits and promptly cut its head off. The cat's head sailed through the air and landed on a snake that was just about to strike, killing it instantly. The Geisha survived, but she was so distraught at losing her beloved kitty that one of her customers decided to have a statue of her cat made, to try to cheer her up.

## **CAT BLISS IN MODERN SOCIETY**

Cats are the optimal pets for professionals. More than half of the world's population lives in major cities today, and cats are well-suited to city life. More and more people are working from home, or looking for soft, cosy companionship when loneliness takes hold. It doesn't take much to make most cats feel content with their lives. They like to spend a lot of time by themselves, they sleep a lot, and they eat or use their litter box when they feel like it. Cats are also fairly cheap to keep and need even less to live comfortably than a mouse.

In recent years, sales of pedigree cats have increased, as have adoptions from cat shelters. The reasons people give for buying pedigree cats include allergies, and certain breeds, like the Sphinx or Siberian (the breed Carina's family chose) are more allergy-friendly than others. Many want to inject a specific kind of energy into their families and feel that a pedigree cat is the right choice for achieving a better balance in their households. A Birman or a Ragdoll are good choices if you want a cosier, snugglier cat, or a Burman or Bengal if what you're after is a more active and livelier companion. This is reminiscent of how people choose to buy specific breeds of dogs. Another good thing about buying a cat from a breeder or a cat shelter is that the cat's health status will have been cleared by a vet, and that the cat will have received all the required vaccinations.

## **CAT PEOPLE**

Pet owners are often divided into two categories: cat people and dog people. A survey performed by the University of Florida in 2017 managed to highlight some obvious differences. The 418 participants all took an extensive personality test. Cat people proved to be more introverted overall, and to like spending time on their own. They were also found to be more creative, independent, and serious, almost to the point of being sentimental, as well as less prone to being swayed by the opinions of others. Dog people, on the other hand, were found to be more outgoing, sociable, and group oriented. They have a strong sense of duty, and they keep both feet planted firmly on the ground.

Psychology professor Denise Guastello determined that dog owners tend to be livelier, while cat owners more often like to curl up on the couch with a book. What companion could possibly suit them better than a cat?

Naturally, there are people who are both cat and dog people and exhibit traits from both sides. Ulrica also has a dog, Hamilton, a brown miniature pinscher who has come to love his cat siblings Bore and Clea. Hamilton joined the family when Ulrica's husband, Magnus, was very ill, and he helped encourage the whole family to spend more time outdoors, rather than just staying inside and trying to survive. Little Hamilton also energised the family cat Bore to the point where they now go toy hunting together and sometimes sleep side by side.

Dennis C. Turner and his colleague Reinhold Bergler, Professor of Psychology at Bonn University, have studied the ways cat and dog owners view their pets. One part of the study involved asking participants to describe their pets' characteristic traits. Dogs were described as more rational, communicative, easy to understand, obedient, and protective. Cats, on the other hand, were reportedly more irrational, emotional, loving, independent, natural, elegant, quick to react, quiet, peaceful, clean and cheap to keep. Dennis is often asked if cats bring people more happiness than dogs, and he usually responds that it's a good idea to decide which characteristic it is in cats or dogs that appeals to you and determine how you might best cater to the various needs of the animal based on that.

Maybe there's no need for us to divide ourselves into cat people and dog people. It's the individual we fall in love with, after all.

Several studies have shown, quite clearly, that having a pet makes you happier in general. The international insurance company Agria Pet Insurance carried out a major survey in five countries in 2020. The results

showed that ninety-five per cent of Swedish cat owners reported that spending time with their cats makes them happier, while eighty-seven per cent of Swedish cat owners further reported that they love their cats. In this survey, only the British loved their cats more, with a whopping ninety-five per cent of respondents declaring their love for their cats.

Cats have also proven to be particularly good at making people feel less lonely. The famous Turner/Rieger study showed that the feelings people have for their cats can be every bit as strong as the feelings of a human romantic relationship, and this is a point we will return to in greater detail later in this book.

## CATS AS SUPPORT DURING ISOLATION

On an unusually sunny day in February we joined Italian vet, professor, and animal behaviour researcher, Sara Platto, who has lived in Wuhan for fourteen years, for a Zoom meeting.

In February 2020, the world's news media zoomed in on this city of 11 million people, which is located by the Yangtze River in central China. This was where the initial reports of Covid-19 cases appeared, which then turned into reports on the horrendous infection rates that soon caused the whole city to be locked down, along with large parts of the world. Sara Platto's eyes glisten in the darkness in her bedroom. Behind her, two other eyes are shimmering: those of her ginger cat Gingy, nine years of age, and one of the three former strays that now bless Sara and her twelve-year-old son, Matteo, with their presence. She found Gingy wandering around the streets of Wuhan just a few weeks after she moved there from Italy. Five-year-old Deawy appeared one day outside Sara's front door, also abandoned, and she couldn't resist letting her in. Dashie, who is somewhere between one and two years old, and is named after her son's favourite YouTuber, was found by a friend of theirs in Beijing. The cat was struggling with respiratory issues, so her friend asked Sara, who is a vet, to help him. Dashie had to be x-rayed, and an ear infection was discovered. After lengthy treatment with antibiotics, he felt a lot better.

In China, cats have long been held in less regard than dogs, at least as status symbols. Historically, dogs have symbolised wealth. As Sara Platto says, 'having a dog was like having a Ferrari.' For example, big fashion

shows were arranged in which dogs were used as the most luxurious of accessories.

In recent years, cats have become more popular, and they recently overtook dogs in the pet statistics. This increase in pet ownership brings its own challenges, as many treat their cats and dogs like showpieces according to Sara, who also teaches classes for dog and cat owners who want to form a deeper bond with their pets.

Her research took an unexpected turn when the pandemic struck.

‘The lockdown here was incredibly strict. It was really difficult. We weren’t allowed to leave our homes for three months. All we were permitted to do was to make quick forays down to the gate to pick up food we’d ordered online. Dog owners were allowed to walk their dogs but not everybody actually dared to do it. I saw people lower their dogs with ropes so they could pee on a patch of grass below their windows. Everywhere you looked, people were panicking. Many of them were stuck inside with half their families, too, because the lockdown happened just after the Chinese New Year celebrations. In some apartments, eight people were crammed in together.’

The Italian Embassy reached out and told Sara and other Italian citizens to prepare for evacuation. The plane was ready to go, but Sara hesitated. Being a vet, she already knew a great deal about coronaviruses in general, and she called some colleagues to deliberate. All of them agreed that staying in would be safer than spending time on buses and airplanes. She also didn’t want to leave her cats, as there was nobody else who could take care of them.

She discussed it with her son, and he didn’t want to leave Wuhan, Gingy, Deawy, or Dashie.

‘We can’t abandon our family, Mom.’

That was really all there was to say about it. Sara and Matteo stayed in Wuhan. At first, the cats mewed with surprise that the family was spending all day at home, and they probably sensed the tension in the air. Gingy got anxious and became incontinent. For a brief time, she had to wear a nappy whenever she left her own room (yes, as the family’s first cat, she had her own room where she kept all her toys).

Their new routine was disruptive at first, but they got used to it after a few months. After that, Sara was free to focus on her study, which she began working on in collaboration with Dennis C. Turner in Zürich. One of

the purposes of the study was to survey the support and happiness that cats and dogs can bring their owners in various ways, particularly to those owners who are lonely or isolated. ‘Cats teach us to take pleasure in the small things in life. Resting our eyes on the horizon, without any obvious purpose in mind.’

Sara refers to many different studies on the benevolent, healing properties of cats, and she also emphasises how valuable it is for children to have cats.

‘It’s so important for kids to grow up around animals. My son, Matteo, was five when we got our first cat, Gingy, and they have been inseparable since the very first moment. They did everything together.’

‘Cats and other pets can teach children to be respectful and tolerant. It also helps them develop their problem-solving skills. These are things no computer game can help them learn.’

She highlights a study from Stanford University, which determined that cats can help children who face psychological challenges or who have reading impairments. Animals can facilitate breakthroughs in therapy. Children can play with the cats and often prefer to discuss their issues with them.

Several surveys underline the benefits that children reap from living with cats. A Scottish study, in which more than 2,200 children aged 11–15 participated, established that children who had strong relationships with their cats enjoyed a better quality of life. The closer they were to their cats, the more energetic and present they tended to feel. They felt sad or lonely less frequently than children who didn’t have cats. On the other hand, they learned to better enjoy their alone time.

## THE MEOW FACTOR

It’s no coincidence that the Internet is flooded with cute cat videos.

In one study, this effect was referred to as the Meow Factor, which is defined as a cat’s ability to spread happiness. People who watch cat videos on YouTube have reported feeling less negative afterwards in survey responses, as well as less sad, less annoyed, and less anxious. Cat videos appear to help us focus on the fun things in life and take hope and satisfaction from them – and this makes the videos quite addictive! If you

want to gain somebody's attention or bring them uninhibited joy, a good idea might be to lead with a picture of some adorable kittens. This idea was put into practice by climate activist Greta Thunberg when she uploaded a video for Earth Day 2021. The video soon received millions of views.

An English survey has shown that the British upload 3.8 million cat pictures every day, but only 1.4 million selfies. There are famous cats who deliver weather forecasts, teach Spanish, or sing a happy newly written song every Friday, like Swedish pop singer Niklas Strömstedt's Devon Rex, Kerstin, who has more than 80,000 followers. 'Having a cat is like therapy. You can talk to your cat about anything – they are sworn to silence, after all,' Niklas explains. 'I got serious about the account when I was on sick leave for knee surgery, and I post a picture every day and a new song once a week. The followers give us so much love.'

He was sceptical of cats when he first met his cat-loving wife Jenny, but he soon connected with his inner crazy cat lady, and the family quickly acquired another cat, Eva-Charlotte.

'The cats frightened me a little at first. I couldn't manage without them today.'

'They give me company, love, and warmth. Cats add another dimension to life.'

Being a performer, Niklas has had reason to reflect on how cats might support people who spend time in the limelight:

'Cats simply don't care in the slightest how you're performing at work. Your cat will be there for you, regardless of whether you're topping the charts, and regardless of how sold out your shows are. Cats are loyal. Creatively, it seems to me that they pick up on things I would never have noticed myself. If two people are arguing their cat will be sitting next to them, probably thinking to itself what fools they are. Kerstin and Eva-Charlotte have a positive impact on myself and on my family. It's so great to meet them when you come home, and so nice to have them around. Just like with people, it makes you worried that they might disappear one day.'



## LIL BUB: THE MOST FAMOUS CAT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

'On the morning of Sunday, December 1st, 2019, we lost the purest, kindest and most magical living force on our planet.' Those are the words that Mike Bridavsky, Lil BUB's owner, posted to his cat's Twitter account on the day she passed away.

At the time she had more than 2.5 million followers on Instagram. A big funeral was planned for all her fans, but it had to be postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Lil BUB was a cat with dwarfism who was discovered in a storage facility in Indiana, USA, in 2011, when she was still a kitten. She was taken to a cat shelter, where the staff realised that she was ill and in need of care before Mike Bridavsky adopted her. In 2012 she was diagnosed with osteopetrosis, also known as marble bone disease or Albers-Schönberg disease. This is an extremely rare affliction which causes the bone to densify and harden, (the opposite of the more famous disease, osteoporosis), but which still causes the bones to break easier. Because of her genetic defects, she didn't grow or jump and move as well as other cats do.

Lil BUB was famous for her distinctive, large green eyes. Besides being rather diminutive, she always had a surprised

look on her face, with her mouth half-open and her little pink tongue hanging out, as though she were about to lick herself. She also had an extra toe on each foot.

Mike wasn't expecting Lil BUB to win international fame when he first began posting pictures from her everyday existence. 'I kept it completely organic. I posted a photo, people shared it, and it just kept going from there,' explains Mike Bridavsky, aka 'Lil BUB's dude, when asked how his cat became a viral phenomenon. The fact that Mike runs a music studio and that famous visiting musicians often posed with his cat, also played a part.

Thanks to the cat's celebrity status, the best possible medical treatment was soon identified and arranged but, in the end, the aggressive bone disease proved impossible to overcome. Before Lil BUB passed in 2019, at the age of eight, she released both an album and a book, *Lil BUB's Lil Book: The Extraordinary Life of The Most Amazing Cat on the Planet*, hosted a talk show, made countless TV appearances, and was the subject of an award-winning documentary, *Lil BUB & Friends*, which was specifically about 'catlebrities'. Grumpy Cat was another star who was featured in the film. At the Tribeca film festival, Lil BUB was photographed with Robert De Niro, who held her in his arms. The film won the festival's Best Feature Film award.

'Dearest BUB, I will never forget your generosity, your limitless supply of love, or your uncanny ability to bring so much magic and joy to the world,' Mike Bridavsky wrote shortly after Lil BUB's passing.

In 2015, Cat Con, the world's largest pop culture cat fair, was founded. It has been referred to as 'Coachella for cats' and has a clearly stated mission: to spread happiness to cats and to the people who love them. In recent years it has become a digital event and a celebration of cats that have achieved online celebrity status, as well as of their owners.

Lil BUB made several appearances at Cat Con, and in 2021, Mike Bridavsky was interviewed in the run-up to the delayed funeral to talk about the foundation, Lil BUB's Big Fund, which was established to commemorate her by aiding cats with special needs.

Lil BUB's legacy lives on to this day.

## TOUCH WOOD

Does seeing a black cat really signify seven years of bad luck? Is it a bad omen if a black cat crosses your path? Controversy persists in these matters.

The Egyptians claimed that cats, black ones in particular, had a protective effect on the people around them, and that cats had the ability to cancel out negative forces. Cats were, as we've mentioned, held to be divine.

However, after the Roman age, cat history took an unexpected turn. Something happened and all of a sudden cats began to be associated with witchcraft. Black cats in particular were thought to be unnatural and harbingers of bad fortune. The Irish believed that a black cat could steal a dead man's soul before the gods could come and take care of it, which is why those close to the deceased would take turns watching over the body until it was buried. The English believed that witches could turn into black cats – this theory even made it across the Atlantic and found fertile soil to fester in America.

Folklore tells us of supernatural black cats, and of pirates who believed that a black cat on deck meant the ship was doomed to sink. Fishermen's wives, on the other hand, thought that black cats signified good luck, and would ensure their husbands' safe travels on the seas. Actors felt similarly and believed that seeing a black cat in the audience on opening night (this was back when cats were allowed in theatres) indicated that their performance would be a success.

Those of us who grew up in Sweden in the 1970s learned to always say 'tvi, tvi, tvi,' which means spitting three times, to ward off bad luck whenever a black cat crossed our path. Interestingly, this superstition is different in different countries.

Black cats are only bad luck in some European countries and in the USA/North America, where you are supposed to toss salt over your shoulder rather than utter a magical spell to ward it off. If you lived in Japan, however, you would cheer if the same thing happened to you. Practitioners of the Chinese art of Feng Shui claim that cats communicate harmony and just dreaming about a cat is thought to be a good omen.

<sup>1</sup>. The Swedish word 'spinna' has two meanings in Swedish, both of which are verbs: 'purr' and 'spin' (as in 'spin yarn'). The fact that they are homonyms is used to great poetic effect in the original poem, but unfortunately, we have not been able to preserve this effect in translation.

# CARINA

## Mia: the Love Spreader



*She came to our home just when we needed her the most. Mia – the black, furry, irresistible Siberian cat and spreader of love.*

*One warm day in July we crammed the whole family into the car and went to visit Eva the breeder in Uppsala, Pelle Svanslös's hometown – that felt symbolic! When we arrived Anders sat down on the floor in the bedroom – which had been more or less taken over by the kittens – and got right in and snuggled and played with Mia and her siblings. He rubbed his eyes, as if to provoke discomfort. But there was no reaction.*

*The next step was to sign the contract for the purchase. The next day, however, Eva called us to express her concerns. What if Anders turned out to be allergic, after all? What if Mia couldn't stay with us? Eva had had some bad experiences when kittens had to move to new homes. We had to resort to our most persuasive arguments and insist that Anders hadn't felt the slightest reaction, and that we wanted to have Mia more than anything else in the world. It suddenly felt like an absolutely necessity.*

*Two weeks before we were going to pick her up I collapsed on the floor in our kitchen. I managed to call out to my husband, who was in the living room. 'I'm fainting!'*

*As I lay there on our kitchen carpet among the crumbs, I found myself thinking that we should have taken it to the dry cleaners long ago. My legs refused to move. My heart was beating far too fast and erratically. I had already been treated for heart arrhythmia for many years without any serious difficulties, but over the last six months my pulse had been racing to an alarming extent and I had undergone an ablation, a minor heart surgery, three weeks earlier. Everything seemed to have turned out well at first. The*

*medical advisory phone line instructed me to go to an emergency ward. After two hours of examinations and choppy EKG charts, I was admitted to the cardiovascular unit so that they could keep me under observation while I awaited a new ablation procedure. It all felt quite exaggerated. My husband was a lot sicker, after all. Should I really be lying there while he was fighting cancer? My children needed me at home. But the cardiologist informed me that they would have to burn my heart one more time to calm it down.*

*The stress I had been dealing with over the last few years had probably accumulated over time. They say that having a loved one fall seriously ill is one of the greatest challenges you can face in life. At the same time, I had spent too long working for an organisation that was anything but a healthy workplace, where my co-workers had suffered poor health and quit one after another. Eventually, this situation had caused me, a member of the management team, to have to juggle the tasks of three or four different people. In the end my body, or rather my heart, had had enough. I was assigned a bed by the window in a room that I shared with three other heart patients. Thin drapes separated our individual sections of the room. The bed creaked whenever the woman across from me shifted her weight or succumbed to one of her countless fits of coughing. The staff ensured me that she had tested negative for the coronavirus. Outside, the summer was hitting record highs, more than 30 degrees centigrade, and I gratefully opened my window to let in some of the mild August air. The electrodes that were attached to almost every part of my body were itching. Before I fell asleep, I thought of Mia and how she seemed to be the light of my life.*

*The third day I spent at the hospital was 9th August, our wedding anniversary. The pandemic regulations strictly forbade visits for any reason, but the doctor reluctantly allowed me to leave for fifteen minutes so I could enjoy an ice cream and a cold orange soda on a bench outside the main entrance, as long as I remained connected to a portable EKG system.*

*The sun was warm, and in hindsight, that moment on the bench outside the hospital feels like one of the peaks of that summer. My husband joined me, and we talked a lot about our new family member, whom we would soon be picking up in just ten days. Our kitten, who was going to bring lots of love into our lives and, studies say, make us less vulnerable to cardiovascular problems in the future. Imagine that!*

*On Saturday 19th August, we could finally go and get her. I had an intense feeling the first time I held her. Little Mia, twelve weeks old and barely a whole kilogram of life, mewed throughout the car ride back to our apartment on Drottninggatan in Stockholm. Inside she ran off and hid under the couch, refusing to come out all night long and throughout the next day. She didn't eat. She didn't drink. We lay there on our stomachs, shining the lights from our phones under the couch so that we could see her, trembling in the corner. We pushed food bowls under the couch. Nothing helped. I found myself turning into a mother hen again. I felt just like when the kids were little and had 41-degree temperatures. Didn't we deserve a bit of a break this time?*

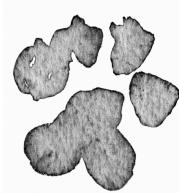
*Eva sent me messages on Facebook, telling me that we would have to take Mia to the vet to get her hydrated if she didn't drink within the next few hours. I really wasn't in the mood to spend more time in hospitals and wondered was she going to die now, before she had even made herself at home?*

*On the evening of the second day, she began to eat. The whole family stood around her, whispering, 'Awww, she's eating! Look!' It calmed us. Mia also seemed more relaxed, and within just a couple of days, she had become a fully assimilated member of our family. Soon, we would all feel the light and the great joy she spreads.*

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# ULRICA

## Cleo: the Circus Cat



*The year is 2009. There's a snowstorm outside the window, and the wind is blowing hard enough to make the windows creak as they push the cold away. I'm standing in the kitchen, cooking food and doing a little dance to some nice music. Bella is sitting on a bench some distance from me licking her gorgeous, pale beige fur. I can hear my child howling with laughter in the living room and when the noise grows even louder, I leave the pots, walk towards the laughter, and find Olivia playing with Cleo, Bella's cat sister, who is doing somersaults and rolling around on the floor like a ball. 'Look, Mom! Cleo's crazy! She's funny!' Olivia howls. 'Look at this!' Olivia grabs hold of the string she has tied to a ball of aluminium foil and then proceeds to swing the ball through the air. Cleo leaps, tumbles in mid-air, grabs the ball between her teeth, and then lands on a pillow on the couch, sits down, and lets go of the ball, as if to say: More!*

*I sit down on the floor and join in the game with my girls. We laugh out loud at this little cat girl's circus tricks, and the incredible joy she takes from jumping around. It's as though our laughter and cheers only trigger her to get more invested in our game.*

*The pasta water is boiling in the kitchen, and I return to my cooking while they carry on playing.*



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# **CHAPTER 3**

## **PURRING CAT**

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*I simply can't resist a cat, particularly a purring one.*

Mark Twain

The purring of cats has fascinated human beings for centuries, and there are countless theories as to why cats purr when they feel pleasure, give birth, nurse their young, or experience fear or anger.

The cat uses its vibrating abilities to calm itself. Research confirms that cats' internal motor is one of its most significant superpowers. Purring is a phenomenon that has more dimensions to it than we could ever imagine and many questions still remain to be answered. Why don't all felines purr? Lions, tigers, and other roaring felines can't purr, because their hyoid bone has a different shape.

Is it the mood of the cat that regulates the intensity of the purring? Why does it purr more in some people's company than in that of others? Might it be that we could interpret our own emotions by learning to appreciate the various energies of the cat? Some theories suggest that we could do just that.

## MASTERS OF PURRING

A series of fascinating discoveries have revealed that it is the actual frequency of the vibrations themselves that can teach us more about purring and its healing powers. We need to better understand both the positive impact on the cat, and what it is about having a purring cat in their lap that makes cat owners feel so much better.

Leslie A. Lyons is a professor of cat genetics at the University of Missouri, and her studies have shown that purring is immediately connected to the cat's survival mechanisms. Cats are able to regulate their energy consumption, as well as influence their own health balance, by purring at different frequencies. Lyons suggests that this is what makes cats so resilient.

The frequency of purring is regulated centrally by the brain. It all relies on a combined vibration that occurs both in the cat's diaphragm and in its larynx. The rhythm follows the breathing. Cats purr both on their inhalation and on their exhalation, in a consistent pattern that varies from 25 to 150 Hertz. This means that the vocal cords don't vibrate, as they do when the cat mews, but simply open and shut. The frequency of the purring is regulated centrally by the brain. This low-energy mechanism indicates that cats have well-programmed genes. Contemporary research has confirmed that purring does indeed have healing powers. When a cat is injured, or feels bad in some way or other, it will purr to heal itself. Cats' bones heal a lot faster than dogs' bones, say, and cats that fall from great heights often survive, despite suffering severe injuries. Cats are also less vulnerable to diseases that impact muscles and ligaments than other mammals, and they rarely contract skeletal ailments.

How ingenious is that?

Lyons claims that felines have evolved to preserve their energy by spending long periods of time asleep or resting. Purring helps them maintain the elasticity of their muscles, organs, and bones, without expending too much energy. Lyons's findings are supported by other cat researchers, who have shown that this helps us understand more about how frequencies impact tissue healing – certain frequencies appear to have better healing powers than others.

Intervals of between 25 and 50 Hertz stimulate bone growth, help heal fractures, alleviate pain, and counteract inflammations. Specifically, 25 Hertz is used in modern vibration therapy in order to promote tissue regeneration after injury or surgery. So, when a cat brushes up against you and responds positively to touch, cuddles, and scratching, it will be pleased, and purr at a lower frequency – about 25 Hertz – both because it likes you and, more instinctively, to strengthen itself.

For humans there are several benefits to sitting down with a purring cat in our lap. The vibrations have a calming effect, because they slow the secretion of stress hormones, which, in turn, decreases the risks of cardiovascular problems and balances both blood pressure and breathing. If you're experiencing soreness from training, have sore muscles or have broken a bone, you would definitely be wise to agree to snuggle with a cat.

Newborn kittens are blind and deaf, but they can feel vibrations, and that's why the mother purrs – to let them know where she is. The kittens

purr back while kneading gently to increase the milk flow as they nurse. This ‘milk kick’ stays with them for life as a symbolic gesture of contentedness and comfort, and cats do it whenever they feel content, warm, well-fed, and secure. If you’re with a cat that is purring while kicking or kneading rhythmically at you that means that the cat likes you, but also that it’s working on becoming more secure in itself.

## CATTITUDE

Purring is like a kind of singing, a practice that helps the cat achieve calm and relaxation. For humans, choir singing, chanting, or other vocal training exercises can be therapeutic in the same way.

According to the American cat behaviour researcher Pam Johnson-Bennett, a cat’s purr is comparable to a human’s smile. We humans are able to smile and express a positive emotion, but sometimes when we smile we do it because we feel uncomfortable. The same is true of cats. They can begin to purr when a stranger picks them up, in part to protect themselves but also as a nervous reaction. If the cat wants to stay, and responds to your touch, this will generally mean that it is experiencing positive emotions, but if it backs away, you should let it be.

Johnson-Bennett claims that we can do a great deal to make cats feel comfortable, and as a bonus, this will also yield a series of positive effects for us.

Cats are territorial and like open spaces, but they also want places to sneak off to and hide in when they need to sleep. Cat owners can create a home that has room for everything their pets need by making sure to keep their litter tray clean, respect their privacy, and not demanding their attention when they have indicated that they want to be left alone. If you hold back rather than approach, this will increase the chances of the cat approaching you, maybe even climbing into your arms. Cats’ purring helps us wind down and find opportunities for recovery in our everyday lives.

### BREATHING EXERCISE

*Purr Like a Cat (Hum Like a Bee)*

In yoga there is a breathing technique called Brahmar, which means 'the humming bee'. First you inhale and on the exhalation, you vibrate and make an 'mmm' sound. This breathing exercise has been recommended to yogis for centuries, as it is said to relieve anxiety, stress, and concern, as well as help you maintain focus, but also because it clears the phlegm out of your mouth and throat. It has also been used to elevate moods, as the vibrations trigger more endorphins and lower stress hormone levels.

Every cat we've ever heard of is an individual, with a personality of its own. This makes it exciting to get to know them, just like when you meet a new person. Although they all share similar communication techniques in terms of purring, mewing, and hissing, they can use these abilities in many different ways. In the summer of 2014, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences founded a cat centre. The reason for this was the lack of knowledge of cats and their behaviour, despite cats being the most popular kinds of pet in Sweden. One of those who spearheaded the cat centre initiative was Elin Hirsch, Doctor of Ethology.

'Cats don't communicate in the same way that dogs do,' says Elin, 'because they evolved from a solitary species. Humans need to be able to understand their cats better, so that they can provide a better environment for them to live in.'

In other words, if the cat is happy, the human will be happy, too. Elin suggests that a better understanding of the needs of cats provides us with ways of limiting undesirable behaviour in cats. Studies carried out by the cat centre indicate that if a cat is denied an outlet for its natural behaviour patterns it might end up suffering both stress and ill health. Its behaviour could also deteriorate to the point where it must be given away or abandoned.

'To counteract stress in cats, you can try to create a stimulating environment that has plenty of toys, climbing opportunities, and small spaces that the cat can sneak off to for a rest. Try to create a large, three-dimensional space with complex courses to traverse that can serve as both a source of relaxation and stimulation. Cats are creatures of habit, and they appreciate it when their owners try to at least keep their care, feeding, and healthcare routines somewhat regular.'

Like humans, cats are individuals, and they don't all use their powers the same way. Elin explains that cats live in a different world from the one in

which we live, as their senses are more coordinated with each other than ours are. For example, they experience entirely different dimensions of sound and scents. The fact that they are thought to be more present in the moment is now explained by the fact that they don't experience time the same way as we do.

Elin finds cats fascinating, both professionally and privately.

'Life is so empty without a cat. I feel that having a cat helps bring out your full register of emotions.'

When Elin was little she was fascinated with the family cat, Lusen, and she began to study how the cat approached her world and her routine. This interest gradually grew into a whole career, and now she holds the title of Doctor of Ethology. Her current cats, Pussel and Louie, inspire her every day to carry out more studies of cats and their behaviour.

'Cats live in a different world, their senses function differently than ours do, and they interpret the world based on different signals. For example, they communicate through scents, which is why they avoid people who wear strong perfumes.'

## **SENSORY APPARATUS**

There is good reason to believe that it is the excellent senses of cats that make them so attentive and intuitive – their senses are sharp when taken individually, but they are also highly coordinated.

### **Keen sense of smell**

Cats have a structure at the top of their mouth called the vomeronasal organ, or Jacobson's organ, which essentially allows them to taste anything they smell. If your cat keeps its mouth open it can determine scents, like pheromones. This behaviour is referred to as the Flehmen response. Cats also use their noses to identify enemies, friends, humans, and objects.

### **Magic whiskers**

A cat's whiskers are thicker than ordinary hairs, more deeply rooted, and provide important sensory information. Whiskers are sensitive – a cat can sense nearby motion based on subtle changes of the flow of air within the space without even having to touch anything. To find prey, cats can rotate the long, stiff whiskers that protrude at the sides of their snouts. These whiskers are also effective tools for measuring narrow spaces. Whisker-like hairs behind their forelegs help cats sense their prey, while the whiskers above their eyes trigger a blinking reflex to protect the eyes whenever something approaches them.

## **Quick feet**

The hind legs of a cat support much of the body when it jumps. You've probably found yourself laughing at least once when your cat was about to start running and began waving its bottom about. That's how cats coil up to make a jump or start running at full speed. Some breeds of cats can run at speeds of up to 45 km/h for short sprints.

## **Balancing tail**

It's sometimes said that you can determine the mood of a cat by watching its tail. If the tail is sticking straight up, the cat wants to interact with you, while a wagging tail often means that the cat is excited about an opportunity to play or hunt. A wildly flailing tail, however, indicates that the cat is feeling threatened.

The tail also helps the cat balance when it climbs a tree or sits on the narrow backrest of a couch. It's also a tool that helps keep the cat from stumbling or losing its balance when it makes a sharp turn in pursuit of a toy mouse, or something else that's lots of fun.

## **Extraordinary hearing**

Little does a mouse, running between the burrows deep inside your house, know that the cat in the house can hear its every step. The conical ears of the cat are about five times better than human ears at picking up sound and

motion. Their amazing hearing allows them to detect ultrasound, too, which means that they might display anxiety when there is a change in the vibrations in their environments.

## **Eyes on the horizon**

You may have noticed that your cat friend usually can't see too well up close, particularly when there is a piece of food on the floor, right below its snout. This is because cats have difficulties focusing on close, immobile objects – they are much better at seeing things that are located or moving further away. Cat's often 'drop' some water before they drink, to determine where the surface is, how quickly the water runs off, and whether there is some kind of danger beneath the surface.

## **Tough Tongues**

If you're a cat owner you're probably familiar with the rather uncomfortable feeling of having your cat's tongue scrape your skin when it licks your hand. But do you know why its tongue feels like coarse sandpaper? The papillae, the tiny, backward-facing spines on the edge of the cat's tongue contain keratin, a hard substance that can be found in human nails. These sharp spines function like a comb and make the tongue an important tool for removing fur during grooming. Licking the fur also helps the cat soothe its worries, fears, and nerves.

## **Flexible spines**

A cat's tongue wouldn't be as useful for its personal hygiene if it weren't for the amazing flexibility of the spine, which allows the cat to reach almost all of its body.

The thirty vertebrae in the spine (not counting the ones in the tail) are kept supple and elastic by all the different ways the cat will stand and lie down, bend and stretch. The small shoulder blades allow a greater range of motion, and the narrow chest and lack of a collarbone allows cats to push themselves through narrow spaces.

## Powerful paws

The external layer of skin on their paw pads is significantly thicker than the skin on any other part of their bodies. The large pad under the front paw serves as a brake and the front pads are the best shock absorbers when landing after a jump.

## CAT INTUITION

It has often been suggested that cats don't care too much for us humans and that they don't feel empathy or loyalty like dogs do. As cat owners, however, we're convinced that cats are intuitive creatures, that they can detect different moods, and that they're highly social and loyal by nature. Sometimes they seem to communicate on a higher frequency, as though they can hear our soul's needs before even we can.

What is it, then, that makes cats so sensitive to our moods?

Moriah Galvan and Jennifer Vonk are two researchers from Oakland University in Michigan, USA, who wondered the same thing and decided to find out more. They began a study of twelve cats and their owners and found that the animals behaved differently when their owners smiled, as opposed to when they furrowed their brows. When the cats were faced with a smile from their owner their behaviour was significantly more friendly: they would circle their owners' legs, rub up against them, or climb onto their laps. They also spent more time around their owners when they smiled, as opposed to when looking troubled.

The results suggest two things: cats are able to read human facial expressions, and they learn this skill gradually. We've long known that dogs are good at interpreting human facial expressions, but cats don't appear to be any worse at it.

The researchers don't believe that cats are capable of feeling genuine empathy and say that it's more plausible that they've learned to associate their owners' smiles with rewards.

Apart from obviously positive acts, like purring or rubbing against people, Galvan and Vonk noted that the cats adopted particular body positions, as well as ear and tail movements, which all indicated satisfaction, whenever their owners would satisfy their needs.

## LIBERATING HORMONES

Research has shown that we do become calmer, more secure, and happier when we have animals in our lives. Cats' habit of interrupting us to demand our attention also helps us improve our stress tolerance. When we pet and snuggle with our cats, and even when they are simply nearby, our pulse will drop, as will our blood pressure, and our cortisol levels will go down.



Cortisol is an alarm signal used by our defence system which activates our stress mechanisms. But when we pet a cat, another hormone is released, oxytocin, and this substance lowers our cortisol levels. This results in improved circulation, recovery, and regeneration of the body's cells.

It has been known for a long time that oxytocin is the hormone that stimulates labour pains and milk secretion in human beings and animals. However, it has several other purposes, too. When the flow of oxytocin in our blood is high, this makes it easier for us to connect with other people; it heightens our curiosity, makes us happier, improves our memory, and strengthens our learning abilities.

'Further to this, it alleviates anxiety, dulls pain and prevents inflammation and stress, while also stimulating healing processes and increasing our sense of well-being,' explained Kerstin Uvnäs-Moberg, Professor of Physiology at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, when we contacted her department to learn more. She explains that the hormone oxytocin is released in response to touch and plays a vital role in

our health. We can't achieve good quality recovery – storing nutrients, healing injuries, and combatting disease – without this neurotransmitter.

‘The substance controls a series of vital functions. All creatures need touch and physical closeness. For most of us, it’s such a natural thing that we don’t realise what it means to us until we go without it.’

Kerstin Uvnäs-Moberg likens this sense of calm and relaxation – a kind of ‘active relaxation’ that we humans can receive through touch, whether it be from another human or from an animal – to the process that kicks in when a mother nurses her baby. Her research has shown that oxytocin counteracts the adrenaline that is released when we get frightened or face a challenge.

We wanted to explore this subject in greater depth, and so we made an appointment with German biologist and internationally renowned oxytocin researcher Inga Neumann of the University of Regensburg. She explains to us that oxytocin is a peptide hormone, which is released from the anterior pituitary gland, and coordinates the activities of our ‘peace and quiet system’. Research done on rats that have been given small doses of oxytocin has shown that rat mothers exhibit a clear interest in and strong nurturing instincts for their young, and that rat babies seem calmer and more attached to the mother as the oxytocin counteracts their adrenaline release. When researchers removed the oxytocin, they observed the opposite effect: increased stress and detachment.

The studies also revealed that both humans and cats experience this boost to their health systems as a result of touch. When we pet a cat it doesn’t just lower our blood pressure, it also lowers the blood pressure of the animal. All it takes is for us to make eye contact with the cat, and the oxytocin levels in our blood will immediately spike – the same goes for the cat, too.

An obvious example of the effects of touch is reiki healing, a treatment method that involves the technique of patting and rubbing your own skin to calm the nervous system when anxiety strikes. Inga explains that stroking a cat’s fur can be even more effective in terms of emotional healing, as well as resulting in greater trust, self-esteem, and well-being.

One thing that is interesting to highlight is the fact that our ‘peace and quiet’ system, which is only activated when we experience our environment as familiar, secure, and safe, is limited in capacity. This might explain why people who are afraid of cats don’t experience the same calm as others do when petting a cat. Context, the environment, and the cat’s personality all

matter, of course, and it is important for a parent to be an intermediary the first time a child meets a specific cat. The cat mustn't be frightened of the child, and the child needs to learn that the cat is a living being that needs to be treated with respect, and that their interactions need to be adapted to the needs of the cat.

Inga Neumann explains that just the scent of somebody you feel safe with, or a beloved family member, can trigger the release of this hormone into the bloodstream. This has to do with our genes, as it encourages us to protect our flock, and the ones we think of as our family. So, whenever a cat is purring in somebody's lap, this strengthens the bond between the owner and the cat, as the oxytocin weaves the strands of their emotions into one.

Inga goes on to tell us about their family cat, a tommy called Shiru, who is most strongly attached to her son.

'Every time he phones back home from the university where he studies,' she says. 'He always starts the conversation by asking us how Shiru is feeling and what he's been up to during the day. He never asks what I've done.'

We know how Inga's son feels. Just like he does, we call our families when we are away to ask for full reports on what our cats (and our dog) have done, how they feel, and what kinds of little adventures they have dragged the family along on.

### FIVE BENEFICIAL EFFECTS OF CATS' PURRING

#### *Stress Reduction*

Purring hinders cortisol secretion and raises the oxytocin levels in the body, which in turn lowers blood pressure and slows the pulse, helping us wind down.

#### *Heart Health*

Cat owners are forty per cent less likely to suffer from cardiovascular issues, and less likely in general to suffer heart attacks. Researchers have connected this observation to the purring.

#### *Healing Help*

The sound frequencies at which cats purr can have an anti-inflammatory effect that can prevent joint inflammation. Treatment using sound waves at frequencies between 25 and 50 Hertz, which lies within the range of cats' purring, is used in healthcare to aid the healing of broken bones.

#### *Pain Relief*

The sound frequencies at which cats purr can have a soothing effect on people who suffer from chronic pains.

#### *Better Breathing*

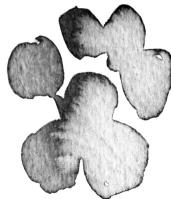
Human beings who are short of breath might find that a cat's purring can help them return to proper breathing. This is because of how the cat purrs both when inhaling and exhaling. The pace at which a cat purrs is similar to that used in breathing exercises, and taking deep breaths in time with a cat's purring constitutes a form of meditation, which in turn aids healing. Superficial or rapid breathing can cause stress, weaken the immune system, and cause sleeping problems and depression.



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# ULRICA

## Tusse: the Master of Purring



*It was Saturday afternoon and I was standing in a copse of birches behind our house, pretending to be a chef who was about to cook a wonderful dinner. My dinner guests were my plush animals, which I had lined up around a board of wood that was resting on some tree stumps. My kitchen was made from stacks of bricks that my dad was going to use to build an outdoor kitchen on the porch, and there were some boards on top of the rocks that were perfect to use as a kitchen counter.*

*I chitchatted to myself and to my guests while I dug around among the buckets and spades, fetching ingredients like leaves, sticks, sand, stones, and water.*

*Our cat, Tusse, was often invited to my dinner parties, and he was my favourite guest. When he wasn't lying around in the sun or sleeping on a blanket, he would rub himself against my legs, as if to let me know he had some menu suggestions. On this particular day he was very insistent and clingy. He jumped onto the boards, seeking eye contact with me. I was still shaking with the echoes of my parents' angry voices – they had just had a bad argument – and tears were streaking down my cheeks. Tusse looked at me and licked my cheek. He cooed, louder and louder (it seemed to me), until I picked him up and sat down. My sadness abated gradually as I gently stroked his fur. Tusse closed his eyes and pushed his head against my hand, making it plain that he enjoyed being scratched behind the ears. My pulse dropped, and my tears stopped falling. Tusse leapt to the floor and began hunting his own tail. I burst out laughing and continued playing dinner party.*

*Tusse was an amazingly masterful purrer. It was as though he had some new kind of radar and could sense when the family needed his vibrations. He snuggled up in our arms or laid down next to us when we were feeling sad or ill. On those occasions, he refused to leave our side. He rubbed up against our legs and curled himself into a ball against our stomachs when we were lying on the couch watching movies. On some days, he would ruthlessly intrude on whatever we were doing, demanding attention, massages, and to be petted. Sometimes these interruptions would annoy us, but then, as he kept on purring and rubbing against our bodies, we would inevitably capitulate and agree to take a break to indulge in some itching and hugging.*

*Tusse became a source of security; a friend to lean on when I was a child. He was always there for me whenever I needed him.*

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# CARINA

## I Hugged Her Paw



*Anders stumbled into the hall, keeling over, with his hand pressed hard against his belly in a desperate attempt to dull his intense stomach cramps. It was ileus again; we knew the symptoms all too well by now. We waited for a few minutes, and then we called the ambulance, which arrived before long. It was 2.30 in the morning and the sixth time in a year it had happened. How was the even possible?*

*When he had disappeared out through the front door, I curled up in a foetal position at the foot of the bed. Mia coiled up next to me. I took her paw, and gently pressed at the soft, velvety smooth pad underneath. Hugged it. My heart beat harder than it had in a long time. She met my gaze and slowly blinked. I burrowed my face into her soft fur and heard her purring at the most soothing frequency possible. I gradually felt my anxiety dissipate. There was nothing more I could do right now. I wasn't allowed to come along to the hospital, because of the coronavirus regulations. But everything would be fine. It had to. Anything else was simply unthinkable.*



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# CHAPTER 4

## WISE CAT

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*I have studied many philosophers and many cats. The wisdom of cats is infinitely superior.*

Hippolyte Taine

If you own more than one cat, you probably sometimes get told that you're more or less crazy – particularly if you're a woman! The 'crazy cat lady' stereotype is often far too casually applied to women who choose to share their homes with cats rather than with humans. Of course, simply owning a cat won't necessarily turn you into a crazy hoarder. On the contrary, actually.

We feel the label really ought to be 'clever cat lady', and we're in full agreement on this point: cats make us wiser. Research findings that indicate that socialising with and caring for a cat can be beneficial to our health further confirm that owning a cat is a smart thing to do.

In an American study from UCLA, in which more than 5,000 pet owners participated, nothing was found to suggest that cat owners were more likely to suffer from mental illness. Cat owners are no worse off than other people when it comes to depression and anxiety. On the contrary, many studies have concluded that cats improve our mental health.

This realisation was even more firmly entrenched after we had participated in the digital CatCon convention, at which the 'What it means to be a cat lady in 2021' seminar was held. One of the participants at that seminar was Heidi Gardner, a cast member of the famous American comedy show *Saturday Night Live*. Heidi has three cats: the Siamese, Marshall, who she found in the street when he was just three months old, and Cubby Bear and Tweaky, two other strays she's taken in.

'At first, I received a lot of dreadful comments about having three cats, like, 'it's a good thing you're already married' Eventually, I got really annoyed about the whole crazy cat lady stereotype. I have three cats, and they bring me such joy. When I come home after a long, stressful day at work, they're there, feeding me their calming presence. So, let's make it known, once and for all: cat owners are every bit as wise and wonderful as

dog owners, whatever their gender. Crazy can mean insane, but it can also mean intensely enthusiastic.'

Cat owners are even more intelligent than dog owners, according to a study performed at Carroll University in Wisconsin, which was reported on by both Time Magazine and CNN. Cat owners in the study scored consistently higher on all questions related to intelligence. However, it's still an open question whether it's the cat who makes you smarter, or whether you need to be smart to begin with if you're going to keep up with such a mentally alert, agile pet.

## CATS AND SOCIAL SMARTS

In the past, pet research has mainly focused on dogs, and the subject of cats has been somewhat overlooked. As domestic cats were bred from their wild relatives, they have been undeservedly stereotyped as less sociable and adaptive than our other four-legged friends. However, an increasing number of tests are revealing that cats match up well against dogs when it comes to social abilities.

For a long time researchers were convinced that cats were unable to form attachments to their owners or share humans' brainwaves, like dogs can. However, they found themselves having to reconsider this. In 2019, a ground-breaking report was published by a team headed by Krystin Vitale, who holds a PhD in Animal Behaviour and is a researcher at the Oregon State University specialising in cats. The results of the study were published by all the big media channels.

'Cats like people!' the NY Times announced.

'Shocker: Some cats like people more than food or toys,' wrote the Washington Post.

'Would your cat choose you over food?' asked National Geographic.

Kristyn Vitale has four cats herself, but nobody has ever called her crazy. She laughs out loud and shakes her head in response to our question about that when we meet up with her for an interview. She's always known that her cats wanted to interact with her, and in 2017 she and her colleagues discovered the first evidence that most cats prefer to interact with a human than eating or playing with a toy. In the follow-up study from 2019, it was established that cats adjust their behaviour to the amount of attention they

are given. The more present the owner is, the more affectionate the cat will be. In other research, it has also been found that cats are sensitive to human moods and emotional states, and that they can learn to recognise our names. Does this surprise anyone? Didn't you already suspect that your cat was one of the smartest individuals in the room?

'My research has confirmed what I have sensed all along: that social interaction is of vital importance for cats. What surprised me the most was the fact that an incredible fifty per cent of cats preferred to spend time with a human than eating, while only thirty per cent preferred their feeding bowl. The idea that cats will only like you if you give them food is simply not correct,' states Krystin Vitale.

She spends most of her days at Unity College, where she works as an assistant professor and teaches animal behaviour and animal healthcare, alongside pursuing the cat research she has been working on for years, but she also works from home a lot. The advantage of doing that is getting to spend even more time with her four cats. The mottled brown, fluffy Macy, who is thirteen years old and blind, was her first cat, and holds a special place in her heart as a result. Kristyn was working at a cat shelter in Ohio when they met. It was love at first sight, and adoption soon followed.

Cat number two, the black short-haired Bo, who loves to perform all kinds of tricks, appeared outside her house one day, shortly after she and her husband settled down in Oregon.

'Bo had a nasty bite on his throat, so I couldn't shut my door to him.' She took him to the vet, and after that, the bond had formed, and he moved in with her. Cats three and four, Carl and Kevin, were found in a ditch when she was out bike riding with her husband one summer's day a few years back. Two cute kittens, abandoned in a little plastic tub. 'Of course, leaving them there in the sun simply wasn't an option, so we added them to our family, too.'

All four are indoor cats, but they all have access to a walled-off section of the garden as well. They can climb their cat tree and jump out through a window that opens onto a passageway that leads to the home-made cat tent. Inside it, they can eat grass and look at birds, but she doesn't let them run around freely.

'They're very different, each a strong individual in their own way. I've tried out all of my research ideas on them. Individual cats can be very different from one another. However, our study clearly found that social

interactions with humans and food were their top two choices, followed by toys, and finally scents.'

The report revealed no differences between different age groups. Different breeds were studied. It was also investigated whether significant differences exist between cats that were caged, kept in a cat shelter, or grew up as pets in a family. Social abilities, however, proved to be largely equivalent in all groups.

One test that has been carried out on both cats and dogs over the years is the pointing test, which is also given to small children as part of developmental assessments. When somebody points at some jars of various colours, the child will follow the finger with their eyes and approach the object – this indicates that the child is capable of meaningful interaction. In 1998, it was established that dogs are able to pass this basic pointing test, and a revolution promptly followed in the study of dogs and their social behaviour. All the major pet research labs in the world began to invest their resources into deeper studies of dog behaviour. The results they accumulated suggests that dogs can detect emotions from facial expressions, understand some of what we say, and have some ability to behave fairly and morally, contributed to establishing the image of the dog as humanity's loyal best friend. Cats were inevitably left behind in this. In 2004, twelve major studies into the cognitive abilities of dogs were carried out, but not a single one was done on cats.

It seems that scientific interest doesn't match up with the huge popularity of cats. Researcher Ádám Miklósi stated that 'We know more about wolves than we do about cats' in an interview in Science Magazine in 2019.

Miklósi had previously, back in 2005, attempted a study in which he applied the pointing test to cats. The cats did well at first and performed just as well as the dogs initially. But then, they confused the research team by leaving the test, one after another. Some of the cats lost interest. Others simply walked away from the actual pointing test. This failure led to something of a cul-de-sac for cat research. Researchers lost patience with cats when they proved to behave differently from dogs. Miklósi even swore to himself that he would never study cats again. 'We all tried, but everyone gave up!' he said in a New York Times interview he gave ten years after the events in question.

What was the reason for this failure? Well, a decade would pass before somebody – Kristyn Vitale, that is – managed to study the matter in greater

depth.

Vitale's research team began their efforts in earnest in 2017. To the surprise of other researchers, the cats handled the pointing test very well, just as well as their canine friends in fact, and most of them happily wandered over to the object the test leader pointed to. Gradually, the mystery began to make sense.

For the next phase, they recruited seventy-nine kittens and thirty-eight adult cats to participate in a 'Secure Base Test' along with their owners. This test is usually performed on dogs. It was done in order to see how cats would respond when their owner left the room. One cat mewed sixty-two times in two minutes, until the owner returned, after which the cat immediately began to move around the room with confidence again.

Vitale also discovered why Miklósi and his team had run up against a wall in their experiment. The idea that cats were too difficult to work with was all a misunderstanding. 'One might easily think that a cat that's going its own way doesn't care about its owner. However, the opposite happens to be true,' claims Vitale. She tells us about a cat called Lyla who participated in the study along with her owner, Clara. Lyla exhibited absolute trust in Clara and was comfortable wandering around and exploring the room, as long as Clara was present. Clara was, essentially, her security blankie.

'It was a lot of fun to see how varied our results were, and the great responses they received. It showed that many were open to the idea that perhaps things were nothing like we had believed. More and more people are coming to realise that cats really are social beings, and that their social behaviour merits further study,' Kristyn says.

She also explains to us that she believes the reason why dog research has received almost all the resources is that people have found more obvious utility in dogs over the years as a result of their roles as guide dogs, canine officers, hunting dogs, and therapy dogs in dementia care and other sectors. (It has been discovered that cats can also serve an important role here, and we will return to this idea in the Nurture Cat chapter).

When Kristyn visited a cat shelter a few years ago and asked to use the bathroom, she noticed that the ladies' bathroom had a cat sign, while the mens' had a dog sign.

'Our conceptions of cats as more feminine animals, and dogs as more masculine, also play a part in all this.'

For her next step, Kristyn Vitale plans to continue her studies on how cats form deeper bonds with their owners.

‘I sense an ongoing shift in people’s views of cats, even among pet owners. Cat owners are spending more time training their cats, bringing them along on hikes and other adventures. This feels like a new development, and it represents a greater integration of cats into our lives outside of the home. Essentially, we’ve been underestimating cats for far too long. Increasingly, people are noticing what their cats are capable of, and it’s exciting to see.’ Kristyn encourages all interested cat owners to train their cats.

‘Whether we notice it or not, cats do learn from us. For instance, they learn that it’s feeding time when we open the kitchen cupboard, or that we will pet them if they mew. Training makes us more conscious of our behaviour to our cats, and the ways it can influence their behaviour in turn. This opens up a deeper level of communication, which can strengthen the bond between the cat and the human. The cat will be encouraged to solve problems and engage in play. My Bo gets restless if I don’t train him daily, and training has become an important part of our routine.’

Many people are curious to hear more about Kristyn’s research, and get in touch with her to ask things like ‘Does my cat really like me?’

Kristyn is firmly committed to the thesis that cats serve a healing role for us humans, and that they spread lots of love. Like us, she is fascinated with the healthy rhythm of life that all cats seem to embody.

‘Cats depend on routines to a great extent. Whether you live alone or not, it might be a good idea to reconsider the balance you’ve set between your work and the other areas of your life. The routines of cats can help us focus on when to eat breakfast, rest, wash, eat lunch, play, or go off and be alone... Sometimes, I find myself sitting down in front of the computer and getting right to work. Before I know it, it’ll be noon, and I’ll have forgotten to eat breakfast. Studying cats can make us more grounded and help us better understand our most basic needs. We might do well to consider this before we carry on interacting with people on social media, and so on. Another thing we might learn from studying animal behaviour is how to be more present in the moment. ‘Cats live everywhere, both wild ones and domesticated ones, in cat shelters and in our homes, and we need to utilise this fact, because it makes the cat an easy animal to study. I’m thrilled that we’re finally seeing cats receive more attention from researchers.’

## THE COLOSSEUM CAT COLONY

Researcher Kristyn Vitale's biggest dream is to visit the famous cat colony at the Colosseum in Rome. More than 300,000 cats call the Italian capital their home. They are distributed across 4,000 cat colonies, with 180,000 of them living in people's homes and the rest in the streets. The Romans are proud of their cats and view them as symbols of the Eternal City. Local law dictates that if more than five cats gather in a place it is deemed a cat colony, and the cats will have legal protection from extermination. The cats are even entitled to receive food, medicine, castration, and care. Thousands have volunteered to help take care of the cats. At first they were mostly women, locally referred to as *gattare*, but as time has gone by men have become increasingly involved in the work to secure the cats' well-being.

## HIGH BRAIN CAPACITY AND LONG-TERM MEMORY

Cats are ranked among the most intelligent animals in the world and actually have more brain capacity than dogs.

Ninety per cent of a cat's brain is similar to the human brain. Intelligence is determined not so much by the size of the brain as by its structure. In humans, the cerebral cortex is the part of the brain that controls our thoughts, decision-making, and problem-solving – our more intelligence-dependent behaviours. Our brain capacity consists of 21 to 26 billion neurons, or nerve cells, as opposed to the almost 300 million that a cat has – although the latter is still almost twice as many as the 160 million that dogs have. Intelligence is essentially defined as the ability to learn from experience and utilise this knowledge for problem solving. Like human beings, cats learn by observing and practicing. This is true regardless of whether the challenge they're facing involves opening a door, ringing a doorbell, or switching a light on. It's "learning by doing."

As you know, stories about cute, smart cats tend to receive a lot of distribution online. Like the one about the six-year-old rescue cat, Quilty, who did everything he could to escape a cat shelter. Surveillance footage shows him channelling his inner Houdini by repeatedly leaping at the door

handle until he managed to open the door and access the next room. A dozen or so other cats happily followed him out of captivity.

Intelligence can also be measured by how well you can recall what you've learned. Cats' memories last for about ten years, and they associate the memory of an event with a specific emotion or location. They won't forget if they have experienced pain or fear in the vet's office, or when they were chased by the neighbour's dog. They are also able to retain awareness of objects or individuals who have disappeared from their sight.

Having said that, researchers tend to compare an adult cat's intellect with that of a two-year-old child. That's how impressive they are – no more, no less.

## BOOK SMARTS

The term ‘book smarts’ can be related to cats in several ways. Doris Lessing and Joyce Carol Oates are just two of the many prominent writers who have, or have had, cats in their laps or at their sides as they write. The presence of a cat can have a calming effect, and aid both creativity and concentration. In her award-winning memoir *On Cats*, Nobel Laureate Doris Lessing discusses her cats’ intelligence, and the various expressions it has taken as a result of their individual personalities. Her cat Rufus had the intelligence of a survivor and would always find the solution to any problem, while Charles was more of a curiosity-driven, nerdy scientist. When she played a record, he would try to figure out where the music was coming from, and when he was still a kitten, he learned to raise the needle arm and gently lower it again. He would sneak up behind the loudspeaker and mew as if to ask: *Where’s that noise coming from?*

He would also mew loudly when entering a room, as if announcing his arrival: *It is I, Charles the Adorable. Am I not the most breathtaking cat you have ever laid eyes on? How badly have you missed me?*

‘Winsome’ was the word Doris Lessing used to describe her cat Charles. He was wise and lovable while her cat General had an intuitive mind and always knew what she was thinking. Unlike the other two, he displayed no scientific leanings or vanity.

In the book Doris Lessing accounts for her lifelong love of cats. She grew up on a farm in Africa with cats running around all over the place, and when she lived in London as an adult she always kept cats, even though she lived in an apartment building. She writes of how fascinated she had always been with her beautiful, four-legged family members, from Grey Cat to El Magnifico, the last cat she owned. It’s difficult to find another writer who has given such a beautiful account of the ways that cats can communicate non-verbally with us humans. Did having a cat make her a better, wiser writer? It seems that way.

Joyce Carol Oates has explained how her children’s books are almost all told from the point of view of a kitten. They all end happily, too, with a cat resting and purring on some girl’s bed. She also published the collection *The Sophisticated Cat*, which features poems and short stories about cats.

Ernest Hemingway, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Bukowski, Mark Twain, T.S. Eliot, Doris Lessing, Stephen King and Patricia Highsmith are other

iconic writers who have enjoyed close ties to cats. The peace and warmth their cats have brought them has probably helped them with their focus. A creative, playful, living, purring companion – what more could you wish for when you’re trying to come up with a story?

Mark Twain even divided people into two categories: people who have cats and people who don’t. He stated that, ‘When a man loves cats, I am his friend and comrade, without further introduction.’

‘No animal has more liberty than the cat.’ The quote is taken from Hemingway’s book *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and the writer definitely lived by it. Early on, he kept a separate cat room in his home in Cuba, but later, he opened the doors to the rest of the house for them.

Ernest Hemingway might be the most famous cat owner in all the world of letters. Like Twain, he revered cats, and he is quoted as saying that ‘A cat has absolute emotional honesty. Human beings, for one reason or another, may hide their feelings, but a cat does not.’

Hemingway also wisely stated that ‘One cat just leads to another.’ Once you get a cat, it can be difficult to settle for just the one. You’ll find yourself wanting even more of the warmth and love that has spread through your house now that there is a cat in it.

Hemingway’s French colonial-style home in Key West, Florida, which is now a museum dedicated to the author, is home to somewhere between forty and fifty cats. Museum visitors can see them sleeping inside the house, lazing around in the shade of a palm tree, or stretching out by the pool. In his most famous home, Finca Vigía on Cuba, Hemingway also kept about fifty cats, and nobody ever accused him of being crazy for it. On the contrary. He called his cats his ‘purr factories’, and he allowed them unrestricted access to the house. ‘There were kittens all over the place,’ visitors have reported, ‘and the dining room table was flooded with cats.’ On the menu: tinned salmon and milk with whisky, just as Hemingway liked it. His habit of collecting six-toed cats also began in Cuba. This was a hobby he shared with the local fishermen. Six toes means good fortune, or so he claimed. Hemingway was keenly aware of his cats’ individuality, and he praised what he called their ‘absolute emotional honesty’.

## OPEN MINDS

The spiritual world is also rife with signs that cats are wise. If a cat turns up in a Tarot or Angel card spread, it symbolises communication. It's as though somebody was trying to tell you something. If you get a cat card, it's telling you to listen carefully and trust in your intuition. It could also be suggesting that you develop your own superpowers.

Sigmund Freud, who is famous for his ground-breaking work in psychotherapy, is often credited with the quote 'Time spent with cats is never wasted'. However, it's doubtful whether he actually said that as he is known to have preferred dogs. In any case, the words have been imprinted in our minds through countless posters and embroideries.

The fact that spending time with cats will bring you a series of beneficial effects is well documented by now. *Psychology Today* magazine and the amusingly named website *The Catington Post* are just two of many media outlets that have explained why it's so wise to be a cat owner. Apart from the calming effects that cats can have on us, and the affection they inspire in us, they also encourage us to keep a more open mind. This was shown in a study performed by Samuel D. Gosling and a whole team of researchers. It should be added here that they also discovered that cat owners were slightly more disposed to neurotic behaviour, but that the presence of the cat added an extra dimension to their intellectual and emotional lives. Another study, by Denise Guastello et al., determined that cat owners aren't necessarily more neurotic, but that they, like their pets, tend to march to the beat of a different drum, i.e., opt for some other solution than the most obvious one. They also felt that the independence of cats was one of their finest qualities. Most people probably think of human beings as the most intelligent species on the planet and many define intelligence as possessing problem-solving skills or having a sharp memory. Emotions and relationships tend to be overlooked in this context. When it comes to animals and their intelligence, researchers have tended to focus on the more conventional notions of smarts. We've had enough difficulties increasing our understanding of the human mind, and the study of elephants or alligators has not been prioritised.

Now things have changed. Increasing amounts of research data on animals' capacities, behaviours and mental abilities are being made available, and researchers have studied hundreds of species in their experiments. The results are astonishing. We live, it seems, in a world full of thinkers, and humans are just a single species among many.

## CATS IN THE WHITE HOUSE

Cats and dogs have become a familiar installation in the halls of power. It's no coincidence that the Oval Office in the White House is often nicknamed 'the Oval Paw-ffice'. Most presidents have kept dogs or cats, and many have had both. It's often said that Abraham Lincoln used to play with his cats to unwind. A smart move! Imagine if more people in stressful positions did that – kept a cat as their mental coach, alongside their regular staff?

- **Abraham Lincoln** (1809–65) was the president who founded the cat tradition in the White House by bringing his two cats Tabby and Dixie along when he moved there in 1861. Since then, the list of presidential cats has grown long.
- The far less famous president, **Rutherford B. Hayes** (1822–93), made cat history when he brought the first Siamese cat to the USA in the late 1870s. Siam, who was gifted to him by an American diplomat in Bangkok, was soon joined by the kitten Piccolomini.
- In 1901, **Theodore 'Teddy' Roosevelt** (1858–1919) moved in with a menagerie of twenty-three pets, including Slippers the cat, who had six toes, and Tom Quartz, who was named after the cat in Mark Twain's *Roughing It*. Slippers was free to move around the White House as she wanted, and she liked to nap in the foyer outside the entrance hall, where visitors had to take care not to step on her.
- **Woodrow Wilson** (1856–1924) had two cats, Mittens and Puffins, but received more publicity for another pet, Old Ike, the magnificent sheep that often grazed on the White House lawn.
- **Calvin Coolidge** (1872–1933), like Roosevelt, kept a whole menagerie of animals, including several cats: the grey, striped Tiger, as well as Blacky, Bounder, and Timmie. He didn't settle for small felines and kept a small zoo, which included a lynx called Smoky and two tigers. His wife, Lady Grace, also acquired a domesticated raccoon that she named Rebecca. Tiger the cat became famous after he got lost and was announced as missing on the radio, before eventually being returned to the safety of his White House home.

- The Kennedys proudly showed off their cat Tom Kitten in family pictures from the early 1960s. Tom was grey with yellow eyes and soon won the adoration of many press photographers. However, President **John F. Kennedy** (1917–63) was allergic to cats, so Tom received most of his love and attention from his daughter Caroline and wife Jackie, until he had to move in with the White House staff member Mary Gallagher, to save the president from having to sneeze all the time. Unfortunately, Tom only lived for a year and a half. His obituary read: '*Unlike many humans in the same position, he never wrote his memoirs of his days in the White House, and never discussed them for quotation, though he was privy to many official secrets.*'
- In the 1970s, Siamese cats were all the rage. Both president **Gerald Ford's** (1913–2006) daughter Susan and President **Jimmy Carter's** (1924–2024) daughter Amy had them. Ford's was called Shan Shein, and preferred to nap under the bed in the Lincoln Bedroom, which is the guest suite in the southeast section of the White House. Carter's cat, who had the impressive name of Misty Malarky Ying Yang, had a song named after it, and preferred to play in Amy's dollhouse or keep her company during violin lessons.
- **Ronald Reagan** (1911–2004) and his wife Nancy kept two cats, Cleo and Sara, on their ranch in Santa Barbara, but they never brought them to Washington. The pair are still considered presidential cats.
- Then, there is **Bill Clinton** (1946–), whose ownership of one of the most famous and loved White House cats, the black-and-white adopted Socks, was well-publicised, including the book and the song that were written in honour of the cat. He also had his own website and Wikipedia page, and images of Socks in the Oval Office, on the speaker's podium in the press briefing room, and taking walks with the president, who liked to carry Socks on his shoulder, were published all over. Socks lived until 2009, when he passed away at the age of seventeen. Hillary Clinton even wrote a book about the family's pets, Socks the cat and Buddy the dog, which she titled Dear Socks, Dear Buddy. The book contained letters written by

children, along with details of the pets' rivalries and everyday adventures.

- Another cat who had his own website was India (nicknamed Willie), the beautiful, black cat who belonged to President **George W. Bush** (1946–), and who preferred to spend his days in the White House library. The family already had a mottled red-and-white cat, Earnie. India lived to be almost twenty years old and didn't pass on until the Obama family moved in (without a cat).
- **Joe Biden** (1942–) refuses to be outdone by his predecessors. After four years of no cats, or any pets for that matter, under Donald Trump, the order of things was restored. First Lady Jill Biden found the green-eyed, grey-and-white farm cat Willow when they visited Pennsylvania during a campaign road trip, and the Alsatians Champ and Mayor soon received some new company.

## CAT PHILOSOPHY

*We've been looking to philosophers to make sense of life. Maybe we should be looking at cats, instead.*

*Washington Post* on John Gray's book *Feline Philosophy: Cats and the Meaning of Life*

The eminent UK philosopher John Gray (not to be confused with the American of the same name who has written of men being from Mars and women being from Venus) dedicates the entirety of his book *Feline Philosophy* to the wisdom of cats and even claims that cats can teach us about the meaning of life. He has four cats, to whom he also dedicated the book: two Burmese cat sisters, Sophie and Sarah, and two Birmans, brothers James and Julian.

If you're a cat owner, you've probably already noticed that it's easy to take on a more reflective frame of mind around cats, and Gray particularly emphasizes this. He even states that leading thinkers such as Aristotle and Montaigne have tried in vain to uncover the secret to peace and quiet in life.

If, however, we were all cats, according to Gray he would be out of a job. Human beings struggle to find happiness, while cats simply enjoy having found a spot in the sun. This insight is as simple as it is wise. Cats are content to live the lives they've been given. Hopefully, they can inspire us to think as they do. Hunting for food is one thing, but hunting for happiness is something else entirely.

Influential renaissance writer Michel de Montaigne sought to define the essence of cats back in the 16th century, and engaged in hypothetical musings like the following: 'When I play with my cat, how do I know that she is not playing with me rather than I with her?'

Even researcher Sara Platto can't quite hide her enthusiasm when she explains how cats can teach both children and adults how to be more comfortable in their own skins.

'In modern societies, we've more or less lost access to intimacy, and we've lost our ability to set boundaries. We think we have to touch each other when a simple look would suffice.'

Sara isn't just a researcher – she also teaches animal behaviour and the relationships between pets and humans. Cats speak the language of love, she explains. When a cat is sitting still and blinking at us, it's actually telling us: 'I'm fine.' When it holds its eyes shut for a longer period, this means: 'I love you.'

'The wordless communication of cats is very rich, and encourages us to look inward,' Sara Platto states.

John Gray is pursuing theories along these same lines. He claims that the human race's mentality and active lifestyle are less than healthy and that we're in danger of deliberating excessively, worrying too much, getting anxious, and feeling bad about ourselves. We surf around, looking for our next kick and the next experience when what we really need to do is slow down and realise that we have everything we need, right here, right now.

The following is quoted from the New York Times book review of *Feline Philosophy*: 'When cats are not hunting or mating, eating or playing, they sleep,' Gray writes. 'There is no inner anguish that forces them into constant activity.'

Humans like to think of themselves as special, but what makes us special also, not infrequently, makes us worse. We are human supremacists whose vanity and moralism and tortured ambivalence make us uniquely unhappy

and destructive. ‘While cats have nothing to learn from us,’ he writes, ‘we can learn from them how to lighten the load that comes with being human.’

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# CARINA

## Magnum: All Heart, All the Way



*JANUARY. I read on breeder Eva's Facebook page that Mia's brother, Magnum, has a minor heart condition. His heart valves are leaking a little and this has caused heart murmurs. This is quite common in Siberian cats, and he will probably grow out of it according to the vet, but all the same it has turned all plans for his future on their head.*

*Magnum is so beautiful – a charcoal cat with three white spots on his stomach. He has the most perfect features, and he was slated for breeding. However, only cats who lack even the slightest health complaints can qualify for breeding.*

*Naturally, I sense a kinship between us. Could it be a coincidence that we're both facing heart issues... or is it a sign? Are we meant to have another cat?*

*Many tried to encourage us to get two cats from the start, since cats like to have company, but we felt that it would be too much work at the time, like running a small zoo. Now, though, the cat flap is wide open. Mia had given us so much love in the short while since she joined us. How much more love would we be getting if we had two cats? Of course we want more! We need all the support we can get, after all. It's been a difficult autumn. In August, when we received Mia, Anders was fully free of cancer and we got to take a break from the chemotherapy. But in September his illness returned in full force. The chemo pump was reconnected and this time Anders felt wearier than usual. More than two years of battling cancer had begun to take its toll.*

*I clear my throat a little, before telling my husband that Magnum is the only one left from the litter. 'It's not as though he's completely abandoned,*

*but he is left over. And to top it off he has a heart condition. He's happy enough staying with the breeder, but the idea was never that he would stay with his mother. And our place is pretty big, after all. There's more than enough room for two cats. Just think if we could buy him!*

*My voice has a pleading tone to it, but this turns out to be unnecessary.*

*Anders doesn't need convincing. He's immediately filled with joy and anticipation over all the things a new little cat will bring to us. Unexpectedly, the kids decide they won't have it:*

*'Over my dead body. One cat is plenty!'*

*'You're out of your minds. There'll be cat hairs all over the place. What will my friends think? Just forget it.'*

*Our teenage sons don't mince words. Are they feeling threatened, somehow? Mia has been receiving lots of attention lately, that's for sure. Have we not been hugging the kids as often as usual? They're teenagers, after all, and occasionally evasive and hard to pin down as a result.*

*We ask them to sleep on it. The next morning, nothing has changed. They still find the whole idea absolutely idiotic.*

*However, once the idea of a second cat takes root, there's no stopping it. Anders and I have made up our minds. 'It's great to hear that you're considering getting a friend for Mia! I'll need to think about this one. Let me get back to you in a couple of days,' Eva writes on Facebook.*

*DECEMBER–JANUARY. Suddenly we have two cats, and it dawns on me how important it is to maximise the love in our family at this very moment, while we're right in the eye of the storm.*

*Magnum arrives, and the first few days are chaotic. Mia doesn't quite seem to see the benefit of having her brother move in and they fight, hiss, and withdraw from each other. Eventually their affection grows and their fights gradually transform into fun and play. After a week or so it's as though he's always lived with us. He's such a natural addition!*

*Being much larger than his sister, he claims a fair deal of space from the get-go, even though he is a little wary and likes to rest under the table in the hall, where he can get a good view of all the rooms in our flat. He's not as quick to ask for petting and cuddles as his sister but in time he grows more agreeable to being approached and gladly lays down on his back to receive our affection.*

*I return home from work. Anders has laid down on the hard living room floor with his legs raised high, resting on the armchair in front of him. He*

*looks up at me briefly, flashes a brave smile, and then closes his eyes again. He's freezing, and he's in tremendous pain. Only his chin and face are protruding from the soft bed covers, which he has brought from the bedroom to keep himself as warm as he possibly can. Damn that chemo! The side effects are brutal. Now, he's struggling with a strange leg pain that's been troubling him for almost a week. Some mornings, he can barely walk.*

*Over the covers, right above his throbbing ankles, Mia is resting without a care in the world, feeding him some extra warmth. They've been lying there like that for almost an hour. She's stretched out fully, forming an S shape, perhaps to occupy the largest space possible.*

*How could she know he's in pain, right in that spot? How can she be this wise?*

*She helps where she can. She simply knows. Precious little cat! Magnum is lying next to her, watching. He was a bit shy for the first few weeks, but now, he's a natural member of the family, like the rest of us. Big, calm, and secure.*

*Over the course of a few days, this has become an evening ritual. 'I'm going to hypnotise you now!' Anders announces, before placing Magnum belly-up on his lap. He scratches his belly gently and clamps him in place between his legs. I think to myself that it's always mutual, all this nurturing. The mere presence of the cats adds calm, play, interaction and joy every day. They make us laugh out loud all the time and speak in baby voices like a pair of freaks. 'Come to Mammy...'*

*I feel such gratitude. Since the cats moved in, our home has more laughter in it, more happiness.*

*I catch myself laughing a lot – it's almost the first thing I do every morning. Mia is so funny. She stretches out and hurls herself down to be petted. She leaps courageously from the kitchen table to the windowsill and back again. She finds a toy mouse and begins to dribble with it, pushing it all the way to the living room. She trips me up when I try not to step on her; she has an unfailing knack for always staying right behind me.*

*Magnum is equally amusing and can stop time! He reminds me to play and laugh and enjoy myself, even before I've had my cup of tea and checked my emails. Lesson learned: laughing and playing are more important than working.*

*After a few death-defying laps around the living room, Mia collapses in an adorable little pile under our coffee table. She squints at me and I feel like she's smiling. Lesson learned: Take breaks. Rest often. Don't pressure yourself too much. There's plenty of time for play.*

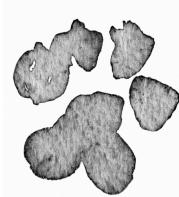
*It seems plain as day that getting a second cat is one of the wisest decisions we've ever made. It also didn't take too many days for our sons to adjust to their new cat reality and come round to embracing another cat – Magnum, who's large and in charge, a full fifteen pounds of pure wisdom. In early January, we receive some terrible news. Anders's chemotherapy is no longer effective. The doctors seem resigned. We're running out of options at this point. I find myself contemplating the worst, thinking to myself that this dreadful, awful cancer might not be stoppable. In all our desperation, we take comfort in our two cats. Our family is a large one. There's myself, the kids, the cats. And Anders. Whatever happens, we'll ride this storm out together. We'll emerge on the other side, where the ocean will be still as a mirror.*

*Mia smiles at me. Magnum does the same. They both lie down, secure in each other's company. They blink, slowly, and I know what they're telling me: It's all going to be OK, no matter what.*

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# ULRICA

## Bella: The Blissful Birman



*I hung up the phone after receiving the news that Magnus, my husband, was in danger of dying because the doctors simply couldn't identify the cause of his illness. I landed on the couch, numb. Empty.*

*Suddenly Bella, our Birman, came running into the room. She ran up and jumped towards the bookshelf. She tried to scamper to the top, but her back paw slipped, and she ended up hanging from the edge by her claws. Before I could even react, she fell with a thud. She rolled over and managed to get up on all fours again in some peculiar way, before shaking off the whole experience. Next, she proceeded to lick her own paws, as if to console herself. I walked over and picked her up and she soon began purring in my arms. Her body grew heavy, as though she was using my body for leverage to add power to her vibrations. She continued licking her front paw while pressing the other one against my chest.*

*I acquiesced and began to stroke her fur and scratch her neck. She squinted and grew absolutely calm.*

*Then, her eyes turned back to the bookshelf. She jumped down, sat herself down just below the shelf, and peered upward. It looked like she was calculating how much energy it would take to get up there without falling again. Her tail, which was moving from side to side, began to move faster. She curled up, arched her back, and jumped. This time she cleared the jump by a good margin and reached the top. She made her way between the books for a while, exploring everything up there before settling down to get comfortable between two bookrests and peering out over the room.*

*My thoughts began to race. Was her first attempt really a failure? Maybe she didn't think of it the way I did? Maybe the first jump was more of a*

*reconnaissance effort, a training run, to calibrate her power?*

*After all, what would happen if cats always managed everything on their first attempt? If they did, they would never acquire the drive to explore life, nature, and the world. How would Bella ever maintain her agility, her strength, and her self-confidence if she never challenged herself?*

*If Bella was able to land on her feet, perhaps I was, too?*

*I lay down on the floor, shut my eyes, and placed my hands on my tummy. I breathed deeply and willingly engaged in reflection. Perhaps Magnus would die and be physically removed from us. Or perhaps the doctors would find a solution. Either way, I would try to respond as Bella would. I invited the reality of the situation to enter me fully, paused, breathed through my tears, and let the significance of the moment reverberate through me. My pulse dropped, my body went limp, my mind went blank, and I heard myself breathing. Suddenly I felt a soft, warm feline body against my stomach. Bella. My lovely, beautiful, wise cat. Her warmth told me that everything would be OK, and that I was not alone.*

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# CHAPTER 5

## TEMPLE CAT

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

Albert Schweitzer

Cats possess power. They enter the room with unwavering poise, and they sit gracefully, with pride. It's almost as though they are encouraging us to watch and admire them. Cats seem to have secret lives; they sneak off to be alone, sleep, rest, or just sit around and look out the window.

Ulrica, who has been a yoga and meditation teacher for decades, takes great interest in the interplay between the inner and outer lives of human beings, and this passion has taken her on many exciting journeys to various parts of the world. This particular journey to India made it more evident than ever that the presence of a cat can be beneficial for spiritual practices.

*It was early in the morning and I was woken by the ringing of the bell. The first time it rang, it was to announce that it was time to get up and get ready to go to the temple. The second time it tolled marked the beginning of meditation time and instructed us to take our places quietly. The third ringing of the bell signified stillness. Closing your eyes, resting your hands in your lap and kneeling down, following your own breathing inward, toward contemplation. Submitting to and observing that which is happening. Registering all the details that add up to form the present. The noises of my surroundings, jumbled up with memories and my experiences of the here and now.*

*After just a week at the meditation centre, which I had been dreaming of visiting for so long, I was struck by how wonderful it felt to be there, and how easy it was to meditate. It was such an inviting environment. It was such a benevolent silence. The air was perfectly just so. Warm, but still fresh. The sounds of nature, of animals and plants brushing against one another in the wind, became a soundtrack that instilled a sense of security.*

*Humans looked me in the eye while I spoke; they were interested to hear my reflections. I didn't have to go to work every day; I was free to focus fully on the process of meditation. There were no digital screens there to lead me astray; all I had was nature, and my interactions with the other members of the group and the animals who lived there. Two dogs and three cats. Each morning as I sat deeply immersed in meditation, I would feel a cat move by me, ever so slowly, rubbing its tail gently against my arm, and then laying down by my leg to fall asleep. The purring went on for so long that I could no longer feel the vibrations. It was as though I was purring along with the cat.*

*Even though opening my eyes during meditation was a breach of the code, I couldn't resist my curiosity. I wanted to see which of the cats it was. It was the mottled ginger. That was always the one that came. Every morning.*

*In the evenings, I lay on my bed, trying to guess if she would come the next morning, and wondered why she had singled me out among all the members of the group.*

*As the days went by, and the ritual kept on being repeated, I learned to recognise the shape of her body, and the texture of her fur, and I no longer needed to open my eyes to see that it was her. I just knew. Her presence, and her purring, helped me let go of my need to analyse everything and just surrender to the moment. Once I did that, I was able to wonder over all the details, like the way the wind felt against my skin, and the fact that things were different every day. It wasn't always a huge difference, but it was a difference all the same. I noticed that my body tended to be more tense in some areas one day, and in other areas the next day. However, the tension would release if I directed my breathing at it.*

*The constant presence of this little cat by my side in the mornings gave me the support I needed to let go of the external world for a moment. I stopped asking myself why she was doing it, and I stopped worrying about whether she would come the next morning. I simply accepted that a small quadruped had managed to open my heart and convince me to let every last bit of life in.*

*Maya, as this cat was called, and her undemanding presence taught me not to attach too much significance to whatever I believed the world was feeling and thinking about me. She helped me accept myself.*

*I learned to be on the inside, to reside in life, and to discover the power of focused mental presence.*

## **MAGICAL, MYSTICAL BEINGS**

Are cats spiritual beings? Many have claimed that they are and pointed to the fact that they possess more developed intuitive and perceptive capacities than most other species. I'm sure many of us would agree, even though we may have a harder time defining what exactly it is that makes them spiritual. Might it be that cats are messengers? And if they are, what is it they're trying to tell us?

Experiences from non-scientific investigations have taught us that cats can open people's hearts, to act as messengers for a higher truth, and help us achieve a deeper understanding of ourselves and of our lives. Cats don't ask for permission to be cats and they never view themselves through the eyes of the outside world, but rather, they revel in their own glory.

To many, cats are the very image of softness and relaxation, but also of stealth and furtiveness.

They are said to be nocturnal animals and occasionally used to symbolise the moon and its phases. In many spiritual cultures, there is a belief that the presence of a cat can have a stimulating effect on female fertility. Fertility goddesses in Hinduism, for example, are often seen depicted next to a feline.

In China cats belong to Yin, the feminine energy according to Taoist beliefs. Cats are more inclined to attach themselves to humans who are attuned to their internal Yin energies. In Taoism, Yin is described as the aspects of ourselves that remain unexplored – the things we do not yet know, control, or understand.

This means, then, that cats can help us open the door to whatever is unexplored within us, but only if we insert the key first. Taoism also endorses the practice of petting cats and encourages us to surround ourselves with them in order to accelerate our recovery after suffering trauma.

This is something we can personally attest to. We commonly see our cats display affection for family members who are ill or unhappy. On the other hand, on ordinary days when nobody is suffering, we've noticed that they tend to choose the family member who is the happiest. It's as though they

were replenishing their energy with the person who is in a state of harmony, so that they will be able to pass the same energy on to whomever has the greatest need for healing or love.

## YOGA WITH CATS

Every time Ulrica rolls out her yoga mat or sits down to do her breathing exercises and meditation, her cats approach, and lie down on the mat or in her arms. It's as though this ritual is also providing the cat with time for reflection and spiritual healing. One of Ulrica's yoga masters explained it like this:

'Ulrica, cats can smell prana, the life force. Their souls have been programmed by the universe, and their bodies are matter made of senses. The reason why they live with us on Earth is to unite us with our inner potential, which is connected to the universe.'

Cat yoga has grown more and more popular in cat cafes. Some call it 'purrfect yoga'. There are also some yoga positions that have been named after cats. Centuries ago, yogis were already exploring human patterns of movement to identify ways of releasing tensions in the body, promote breathing, and prevent stress. They observed animals in motion and mimicked them, and they discovered the positive effects of moving like cats, dogs, cows, and eagles, panting like horses and lions and hissing like snakes.

### CATS ARE MAGICAL ANIMALS

Lars Hain is a business scholar, meditator, and mindfulness coach who has experienced the magical powers of cats many times. A few years ago, a friend reached out to ask if Lasse would help him find their dog, who had run away.

Lasse has the ability to sense energies and see things the rest of us cannot. He searched the beach but found no dog. He kept going for several hours, without any success. Later that day, he went back to the family to bring them the bad news. He was in despair over failing to help them as he had intended.

In the kitchen he came across the family cat, who was a big ball of fur. She glared at him, as Lasse puts it, 'as though I were a pretty pathetic character... But then, it hit me: what if the cat knew something about the dog? I meditated, formed a

connection with the cat, and proceeded to ask her if she knew where the dog had gone. The cat showed me a quick image to explain that the dog was in dark water, and then it disappeared. I couldn't face telling the dog owner anything, it was too hard...'

Two days later, the dog was found in a swimming pool. It had gotten entangled underneath a tarp.

'The whole experience was rather magical. Cats communicate in images, which often have a rather dreamlike quality. And that's what makes them such magical animals. In order to see the images you have to tune in to the cat's frequency. Try meditating with your cat, and see what happens,' Lasse suggests.

## THE ESSENCE OF CATS

There is no shortage of myths involving cats. For instance, they are said to have more than one life, to be devious, foolish, monstrous predators, self-centred, able to eat anything, and incompatible with dogs.

Most of these myths first emerged as Western thought evolved, and many great thinkers, including Aristotle and Descartes, claimed that very little goes on inside the minds of animals. Others, like Darwin, framed homo sapiens in the same evolutionary context as the rest of the animal kingdom. Few wanted anything to do with this idea, and the intellectual pendulum began to swing back. Cats, dogs, and other animals that lived in close proximity to humans were regarded as mere slaves to instinct and suitable subjects for scientific experimentation. Today, great progress is being made in ethological research, and we're seeing more and more evidence that animals are thinking, sentient beings. The Egyptians, the Mayans, and the Incas all claimed that it is no coincidence that women carry babies for nine months and that cats have nine lives. We all set out in life within the darkness of the womb. Cats' affinity for darkness is related to their exceptional night vision, which is often connected to the subconscious in shamanistic traditions. This might suggest that it's important to practise gaining insight into yourself and your life. Like a cat, we mustn't close our eyes to the dark sides of life. Darkness is just darkness, until we infuse it with some other meaning.

In the mythology of the ancient Micronesian cultures, the mother goddess Kybele had two large felines, which were often depicted as lions or tigers,

each seated on one side of her throne. In Hinduism, fertility goddesses are often depicted with felines. Our own Scandinavian fertility goddess, Freya, was said to drive a chariot drawn by cats. The fertility twins, which include the god Frey (which means 'lord') and the goddess Freya ('mistress' or 'lady'), were worshipped all the way back in the Bronze Age. In the myth, Freya's cats were said to be her favourite animals. She belonged to a clerical order of women, the seeresses who were referred to as Völva. Freya was described as sexually indulgent and was also the goddess of childbirth.

Another girl who liked her cats was Torbjorg, the last Völva, whose story is told in the Saga of Erik the Red, which dates back to the 10th century. Torbjorg would travel around the various villages of Greenland during the winter months to help people in need, and she was always received as a distinguished member of society. Before her day's work, Torbjorg would don the attributes of her station, including her seeress outfit, which consisted of a blue robe adorned with beautiful stones. On her head she wore a black lambskin hood lined with white cat fur. Her hands were warmed by her catskin gloves and her feet by catskin shoes. Cats and their skins were considered attributes that helped her leave her everyday surroundings, connect with Freya, and enter a trance. When Christianity ultimately prevailed, this practice was vilified and deemed heathen. The Völva turned into the witch, and the cat became a dark accessory, associated with Satan.

## CAT AS COMPASS

We head for Mallorca, where we meet up with Katja Shumacher, a shamanic healer, who informs us that cats have become increasingly popular pets on the island.

'I think it's related to the fact that they're here to help us cleanse the Earth, and remind us to stop polluting the planet, ourselves, and our collective consciousness,' she suggests.

Katja tells us about her three cats and how they reflect various aspects of her life. The oldest cat, Churro, is intensely loyal to her husband, who is very ill, and almost never leaves his side.

'Churro gives him the support he so badly needs to take proper care of himself and find the strength to keep fighting his disease. Churro dulls his

pain by just being there, by playing and fooling around with my husband, who gets to laugh and think of something else for a moment,’ she explains.

Nala, a mottled female, came into Katja’s life at a time when she was beginning to doubt her chosen path as a shaman and masseuse, as she was exhausted by the ordeal of having a loved one suffer a serious illness. A friend of Katja’s explained that it meant good luck to have a cat with three distinct colours and that she believed Nala had come to Katja to help her find her purpose. ‘Nala is my spiritual compass. Whenever I stumble, she’s sure to be there. I look at her and instantly I’ve returned to full clarity on how to make my next move. Cats are here to remind us all that we’re perfect just the way we are,’ she claims.

## FOUR-LEGGED ZEN MASTERS

Cats are masterful at absorbing the world around them. They seem to be showing us how we could start processing things we have not yet begun to comprehend.

By resting, playing, lying around in the sun and ensuring their security, they make room for events and memories to be converted into useful energy. In that regard, cats are highly sensitive animals. They are excellent at relaxation and recovery, and they always prioritise their own needs over everything else. When they take one of many naps they fit into their day, they seek out a comfortable spot, the specifics of which can vary wildly. Sometimes they might stretch out on the kitchen floor or on top of the hat rack to sleep. Other times they will sit immobile, almost like statues, staring intently at something or other. Other times still, they zoom out and just stare blankly into nothingness. They are like tiny meditation masters.

Björn Natthiko Lindeblad (1961–2022) was a successful economist from Gothenburg who left behind his comfortable life and travelled to Thailand to live as a Buddhist monk for seventeen years. He was given the name Natthiko, which means ‘he who grows in wisdom’ by his master. Björn called his monk name his guiding star, and used it to set a course to guide him through life. From having felt rather lost, he soon learned to switch focus and live in full acceptance of his failings, giving his curiosity free rein. For several years Björn worked as a popular meditation coach and lecturer, and his voice brought comfort and inspiration to countless people.

We had the privilege of getting to speak to Björn towards the end of his life, which was cut short after he was diagnosed with the incurable disease ALS in 2018. Despite this, he still experienced curiosity in the life he shared with his wife, Elisabeth. One reason for this was their little cat Sebastian, or Sebbe for short, who entered their lives one day. ‘We were at a dinner party in our friends’ house, and we were sitting in the garden chatting, when a little kitten snuck towards us on the lawn,’ Björn explained. ‘It was skinny and malnourished, and its ears were riddled with scabies. Our friends explained that it had been showing interest in them over the last couple of days. The kitten followed us when we headed down to the water, and I inquired about its gender. “A boy,” they answered, and went on to inquire what I felt its name should be. All I could think of was an old power ballad, Sebastian, so that’s what I said. We agreed that the name was a good choice.’

When Björn and Elisabeth were about to head home, Sebbe was asleep underneath the wheelchair, and their friends took it as a sign that he had chosen his family. ‘I was still able to drive, so Elisabeth got to hold this little creature in her hands.

‘He lay there, absolutely safe. It felt like a special occasion. Like a ride home from the maternity ward.’

Their beautiful, tidy, almost convent-like home soon filled up with little balls, small toy rats, toy sticks, squeaky toys, litter boxes, colourful bowls and cat beds. They went to the vet to get rid of the scabies, and get Sebbe chipped and vaccinated, as well as some information on cats.

‘Sebbe bonded the most with Elisabeth, as she was the one who fed him, cared for him, cleaned out his litter box, and spent the most time with him. She’s very obviously his main human, and I’m the secondary one. He feels connected to her. I like that, because I feel that Elisabeth won’t be as alone, now that I’ll soon be gone.’ Björn explains that he never expected a little cat to have such an impact on their lives, and that Sebbe has helped bring them all even closer, that his existence allows them to share something other than just time. Laughing at Sebbe’s antics elevates the moment and serves as a healing agent in the midst of all the challenges and difficulties they’re facing, and Sebbe inspires a healthier attitude to life through his constant interventions. For example, when Björn watches a film or reads a book, Sebbe will often lie down in front of the screen or pages, as if to point out what really matters.

‘I think Sebbe’s self-centeredness is absolutely fascinating. All of his wishes are met, and he doesn’t even thank you after you pet him for an hour. I don’t think cats play to prepare for hunting; I actually think they do it just to enjoy themselves. Getting to live a life where play takes such a central role is healing to me, because it helps remind me not to take life too seriously.’

Cats, it turns out, have more nerve cells in an area of the cerebral cortex that gives off a greater number of alpha waves, which are produced during, and associated with, relaxation and contemplation. These waves manifest whenever humans and cats enter a relaxed mental state. Cats maintain this alpha state during most of their waking hours. You might think of this as the Zen zone. Cats are actually bona fide Zen gurus.

Björn loved to sit in his armchair, watching Sebbe stretch out on the rug. He wished his own body could be that supple and active. And he noticed how much of his life was being lived through Sebbe.

‘OK, so an incredibly well-trained and well-coordinated human can functionally coordinate between sixty and seventy per cent of their muscle groups. But when a cat jumps, every single nerve in its body jumps, too. When a cat relaxes, every fibre of its being relaxes. They are fully committed to the somatic aspects of everything they do. I love being reminded of their absolute sincerity. It’s also so inspiring to watch how incredibly good they are at relaxing. Sebbe is incredibly good at getting his way, and he’s admirably clear about what he likes and where to scratch him. He’s never bored, or antsy. He’s fully invested in everything he does. Cats are so single-minded about their very being. They don’t walk around wishing things were different. They enjoy life. I love Sebbe’s spontaneous outbursts. His crazed leaps and flips, as though he were dying to blurt out, “I’M HAVING A HELL OF A TIME!” I think that’s such a great thing to see.’ As we spoke, we discussed the potential symbolic meaning of increasing interest cats receive from humans today. Perhaps we need their help to find our way back to what really matters, both to ourselves and to our planet.

Cats can lead the way for us on this inner journey, to make sure we do our spiritual lives justice. They can help us face our emotions and begin to reflect on how we behave toward one another.

As Björn so wisely concluded: Sebbe the cat came to him and his wife, Elisabeth, to teach them that life is about what is, not what was or will be.

## HOLY CATS

Ulrica has had many cats. During her childhood they were farm cats, but as an adult she made the decision to get herself a Birman. Ulrica, who is a passionate meditator and yogi, learned about the history of the breed, started reading more, and was fascinated. The Birman is also thought to be well-suited to indoor life, which was important to her as she lived in a flat in the city. Ulrica received her first Birman, Bella, as a thirtieth birthday present from her husband, Magnus.

Ulrica and Magnus went to visit a breeder, and they both fell in love with this blue-eyed, long-haired breed. At first they had their eye on one of the males of the litter, but during their playtime with the kittens one of the females climbed up and snuggled down inside Magnus's shirt pocket. Bella the Birman had chosen her new family, and she soon arrived at her temple in Hammarby in Stockholm. The Birman breed is often referred to as sacred, because legend has it that they used to be temple guardians.

In the Far East, in Myanmar (previously known as Burma), there is a shimmering lake, Indawgyi, in a valley near Mount Lugh, between Moguang and Shwebo. The area is home to the Khmer people, who built temples there in the early 18th century to serve as sites of worship for their deities. In this place, there was a temple known as Lao-Tsun. The temple was home to a white cat, Sinh, who had yellow eyes – yellow like the reflections of his lordship's golden beard, or the gilded body of the blue-eyed goddess.

The high priest of the temple was Kittah Mun-Ha, a great Lama who always kept Sinh at his side whenever he prayed to the blue-eyed goddess Tsun-Kyan-Kse. When Burma was invaded by their enemies, chaos ensued, and the holy walls that surrounded the temple were breached.

The high priest Kittah Mun-Ha was slain, and when his spirit left him the white cat Sinh leapt up onto the throne and onto his master's head, which was lowered in reverence to the goddess. The gathered priests were dumbstruck when the cat's white fur stood on end, and its yellow eyes turned blue as sapphires in the reflections of Mun-Ha's golden beard. When Sinh slowly turned his head to the South Gate, his ears, legs, tails, and face all took on the same brownish grey colour as the fertile soil. Only the paws, which still touched the priest's silvery hair, retained their white colour.

The cat turned to the temple entrance, where soldiers could now be heard approaching. The priests who had received signs from the goddess before this vision gathered their courage and struck back at the invaders by sealing the great bronze gates and seeking refuge in the subterranean tunnels. Their actions saved the temple. Sinh didn't leave her master, but seven days later, she died in mysterious circumstances. The new Kittah announced that all the cats in the temple had undergone the same transformation as Sinh. Their paws were white, their snow-white fur glistened like gold, and their topaz eyes had turned into sapphires. Kittah prostrated himself on the ground and waited reverently.

## MORE LEGENDS OF DIVINE CATS

In archaeological sites in Egypt, many finds of expansive grave sites with mummified cats have been made. The Abyssinian cat is similar to the temple cats that are often depicted in pyramids and temples. Killing, smuggling, and stealing cats were all crimes punishable by death.

Five thousand years ago, in the town of Bubastis, there was a temple dedicated to the cat-headed goddess Bastet, who was the patron deity of the heart and the secrets of women. (Maybe Carina should name her next cat Bastet, to make sure her arrhythmia gets even better?) She was also the muse of music, dance, joy, family, and love.

In another legend it is told how Emperor Constantine's mother saved Cyprus from being invaded by snakes. On her orders a thousand cats were taken to the island and they made short work of the snakes. Since then, cats have been living in Saint Nicholas Abbey on the Akrotiri peninsula, which was home to an order of monks until the 16th century. Now, it is a convent used by nuns.

All the nations of Mesopotamia expressed great admiration for cats. They were closely associated with the Greek goddess, Artemis, who was an excellent huntress, just like a cat. According to legend, cats also served as interpreters, carrying messages between human beings and the gods. Cats also appear in Hindu epics, like Mahabharata and Ramayana. In Mahabharata, we hear of the cat Lamasa and the mouse Palita, who help one another escape certain death and discuss the nature of relationships during their flight. They grow in the face of their crisis and form a strong

bond of friendship. In the Ramayana epic, we are told of how the god Indra, after seducing a married woman, disguises himself as a cat to escape the angry husband.

There is a beautiful creation myth from Persia which relates how the hero Rustum offers shelter to a wizard, and when asked what he wants in return, he says nothing. In response, the wizard conjures up a kitten out of smoke and two bright stars for Rostam.

In Medieval times, the church believed that witches and warlocks used cats to induce people to question the power of the church. Intense persecution of cats ensued, and they were tortured to death in public spectacles on market squares all over Europe.

It wasn't until the reign of English Queen Victoria that cats were finally able to breathe easily again and reclaim their popularity. Queen Victoria was fascinated with the Egyptians and the goddess Bastet, so she adopted two Persian cats and made them court officials. The news reached the USA and in 1860, in an issue of *Godey's Lady's Book*, Louis A. Godey wrote that cats weren't only for monarchs, and that everybody should feel comfortable enough to welcome a cat's embrace, love, and virtues.

In the Old Testament, in Leviticus 11, the rules of cleanliness are given. Dogs and cats were both thought to be unclean animals according to Jewish and Christian beliefs, but the priests of the Orthodox church treated the animals with greater kindness. They didn't mind letting them inside the temples.

If, God forbid, a dog should cross the threshold and enter the temple, it wouldn't be enough to clean the floors and the entire temple would need to be sanctified. It's not entirely clear why dogs have become such objects of scorn that they are practically regarded as evil spirits. Cats, however, enjoy their protection, and in some abbeys there are even cat flaps in the gates to make sure the cats will be able to come and go as they please. The priests explain that this is the only way to keep the sanctuaries free from rats and mice. The hunting skills of cats have earned them a place of privilege, not just in churches but also in many castles and manors.

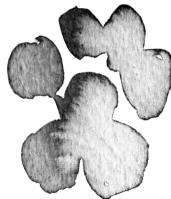
### MEDITATION EXERCISE

AS COOL AS A CAT

1. Choose an object that you like. It should be something small, like a rock, crystal, feather, or flower. It should also be a reasonably neutral object, one that won't trigger too many emotions in you; wonder and interest are what you're aiming for. Something that calms you, ideally something from nature.
2. Sit comfortably and straighten your back.
3. Place the object in front of you, at about half a metre to a metre distance.
4. Rest your hands in your lap and close your eyes for a moment.
5. Pay attention to your body. Feel your weight against your seat, but keep your head held high.
6. Take some long, deep breaths, until you feel yourself focusing better.
7. Focus your gaze on the object. Look at it. Note its details, as though you were soon going to have to describe it to yourself in your mind or draw a picture of it from memory.
8. Lie down and rest for a minute.

# CARINA

## Meditative Mornings



*I roll my green yoga mat out on my living room floor. Magnum watches me curiously, then settles down close by. He seems secure and well aware of precisely what will follow. I begin to shake out the tension, first from my feet, then my arms, legs, and my whole body. I pick up the pace as I go, feeling the energy flow through me. Magnum stares at me. Does he think I'm crazy? I start to laugh. Kundalini shaking can have this effect on both human beings and animals, but I must confess that I have become somewhat dependent on starting my days with some shaking.*

*After a ten-minute guided yoga session on gratitude, which is delivered by an American yoga teacher through an app, I sit down on the couch to meditate for a bit, before taking on my more demanding tasks for the day. Mia is nearby on a blanket, and from time to time I stroke her, as if to make sure she's still there by my side, to reinforce my sense of calm. It's really no surprise that cats have been thought to be spiritual beings since the dawn of time.*

*I think of the fact that they are said to communicate through images and I try to imagine the image of myself with a calm, happy expression – not anxious or stressed, two states I spend far too much time in! I try to look beyond the day that is about to begin which will involve hospital visits for Anders and work meetings for myself. My mornings are becoming increasingly important. We've found a sensible morning rhythm together, the cats and I. Nobody bothers us. Anders usually sleeps in, and the children won't wake up and get ready for school for another hour or so.*

*When I walk into the bathroom Mia and Magnum jump onto a shelf each, with Mia taking the higher one, and then they both curl up and fall asleep*

*while I shower, brush my teeth, and dab on some mascara. I feel like we do everything together. And there is nobody I'd rather share my peaceful, meditative mornings with.*

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# ULRICA

## Bore: Weaver of Souls



*It was late in the afternoon of 11 January 2015 and we were visiting the vet. Magnus, the children, and I were torn up after having said goodbye to our beloved cat Bella, who had just passed away. We got to have her for eleven years.*

*The sorrow ached in my chest, and my tears kept falling.*

*The week before she had suddenly fallen ill and been overcome by fatigue and apathy. We took her to the vet and their tests revealed that she had a bad case of kidney failure. They did everything they could to save her life but in the end we had to face the inevitable and bid farewell to this wonderful creature who had helped us make such strides in our lives. It was horrible. I think I took it the hardest.*

*She was our first child, after all. Magnus and I both felt that way. Bella's presence had turned us into a family. And now, she was gone.*

*We were beside ourselves with grief.*

*In the days leading up to the end, when we realised it wouldn't be long, I called Tuija, a cat whisperer who had helped us once in the past when Bella had suddenly refused to eat. Tuija came over and sat silently with Bella for an hour, taking lots of notes on a sheet of paper, and then sharing what she felt Bella had told her with us. We followed her advice and within two days Bella was back to normal. So, we had a lot of confidence in Tuija.*

*Tuija suggested that we should consider getting a new cat after Bella's passing, as it would be a good source of support in our mourning and ensure that there would continue to be a cat in our home. We decided to go and look at a cat that had been advertised by a breeder right after we'd said goodbye to Bella.*

*I regretted the decision before I'd even left the car. It felt like a betrayal of Bella, and I couldn't imagine I would ever love another cat the way I had loved her. When we arrived at the breeder Christina's house she greeted us with tea and sandwiches. It felt so good to find my bearings in a cat home, rather than our own home, which was still full of Bella's energy. To top it off, the person we were visiting knew our pain very well.*

*Christina's two adult cats came up to greet us and jumped onto our laps, as if to console us. Christina read the room and let us snuggle with the cats. Then, she asked us if we were ready to meet the three cats she had for sale.*

*We followed her into the living room where three white balls of fur were rolling around, playing with their toys. When we sat down on the floor the kitties came up to us to say hello, curiosity written all over their faces, and we began to play with them. One of the cats was calmer than the others, and Christina told us his name was Assar. He was a handsome Birman male, with deep blue eyes and chocolate-pointed face, paws, and tail. He was one of the sweetest, most adorable creatures we had ever met, and we all fell in love. After crawling into our daughter Olivia's arms, he fell asleep on her lap.*

*Six weeks later, we went to pick Assar up, and we all sensed that Tuija had been right. Our mourning had gradually transitioned into energetic preparations for receiving little Assar.*

*This peaceful, lovable soul came into our lives as a blessing, and with Assar there to look after us, our family grew even stronger.*

*When Assar was one year old, I received word from Christina that she had a kitten who might make a good brother for him. We had enjoyed having two cats before, when Bella had a sister, Cleo, who had been part of our family until she died of food poisoning at the age of three.*

*Bore entered our household, and where Assar was timid and peaceful, Bore was driven by curiosity and playfulness. They complemented each other beautifully. In the spring of 2016, our family's life changed radically, as Magnus's liver condition, PSC, got worse. Hospital visits, surgery, blood poisoning, fevers, worries, and uncertainty... Our family life suffered badly, and my time was mostly spent trying to manage the situation. The laughter died down and more sombre moods took over. Assar seemed to sense that something wasn't right. He was more withdrawn than usual, and began to pee in Magnus's bag, on his clothes, and on his side of the bed. We tried spending more time with him, changing his diet, and giving him more*

*stimulation. We also considered the possibility that it was a reaction to Bore claiming more space. I got in touch with Christina, and she told me that Assar had always been a sensitive cat who didn't deal with change very well. She suggested that he move in with some of our friends for a while.*

*Assar had stayed with Tinta, a good friend of the family, when we had travelled in the past and she didn't mind looking after him for a few weeks. He blossomed in her care. It was difficult for us to accept that he wasn't happy with our family, but this was simply a cat who was more comfortable around a single owner. With Tinta, he got the attention and the quiet he needed.*

*In December 2017, we were told that Magnus would need a new liver to survive. In February, he was added to the transplant waiting list, and in August 2018, he received a new liver and a new chance at life.*

*During this time, Bore anchored our entire family. He always crawled into our arms or stayed nearby when we needed him. He often wandered up to me and lay down on my chest when I'd broken down and burst into tears over our situation, feeling drained and unsure of how to face the prospect of a future without Magnus. When my life was falling apart, Bore was there with his soft snout, his furry body, and his patient, loving spirit. He gave me the space I needed to rise to the moment and take charge of my emotions.*

*Bore is the wisest cat I have ever met, and it seems to me that his soul is present in all my cats. A bit like the god Ra.*

### CAT WHISPERERS

Cat behaviourists or cat whisperers are individuals who work as therapists for pets. By interpreting the various things the cat communicates through its body language and behaviour, cat whisperers can discern what a cat is trying to communicate, and determine if it is ill or in pain. Some cat whisperers are also mentally attuned to other aspects of reality and claim to be able to receive deeper communications from the cat.

Josephine, who you will encounter in Chapter 8, is a certified cat whisperer.



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# CHAPTER 6

## HOUSE CAT

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*I love cats because I enjoy my home; and little by little, they become its visible soul.*

Jean Cocteau

Cat lovers who have had to go without cats for prolonged periods of time know the empty feeling this can bring. Their homes become harder, somehow. All playfulness is gone. Laughter and everyday fun become less common. A bookshelf is just a bookshelf, and never an exciting climb. There is nobody to pet while you're on the couch watching TV. Something is missing. A cat soon becomes a member of the family, a natural part of your home. The comfort your cat offers also makes you want to spend more time at home.

The feeling of being greeted by a cat or two when you come home from work is hard to beat. A happy noise is usually the first sign that your cat wants your attention. Mewing might be followed by little nips and cheek rubs, assuming you don't immediately hang your coat and offer your time and affection.

When you're away on travels, you can physically feel how badly you miss them. You'll be wondering if your kitty will be resentful when you get back home and punish you by refusing to greet you or withdrawing, like protesting children.

*A home without a cat – and a well-fed, well-petted and properly revered cat – may be a perfect home, perhaps, but how can it prove title?*

Mark Twain

The cat-loving author Mark Twain produced countless great quotes about cats. It is said that he preferred cats to people. He wondered at their wisdom, while also making his feelings known about us homo sapiens: *If*

*man could be crossed with the cat, it would improve man, but it would deteriorate the cat.*<sup>1</sup>

He shared his home with up to nineteen cats at any given time. His cats had amazing names like Bambino, Apollinaris, Beelzebub, Blatherskite, Buffalo Bill, Satan (!), Sin, Sour Mash, Tammany, Zoroaster, Soapy Sal, and Pestilence. Cats often played backup roles in his books, including *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, in which there is a cat named Peter. When Twain travelled, he made a habit of renting cats, so that he wouldn't feel too lonely in his temporary home. Twain Expert Albert Bigelow was present when the author rented three kittens in the summer of 1906, whilst staying at a house in Dublin, New Hampshire. He named one Sackcloth, and since the other two were identical, they shared the name Ashes.

‘Once, as he was about to enter the screen door that led into the hall, two kittens ran up in front of him and stood waiting,’ Paine recalled, in an old article in *New England Today*.

‘With grave politeness he opened the door, made a low bow, and stepped back and said, “Walk in, gentlemen. I always give precedence to royalty.”’

When his holiday ended, he left sufficient funds with the owner of the house to ensure that the cats would be given the best possible care for the duration of their nine lives. Back home, his favourite cat Bambino ran away from Twain’s apartment on Fifth Avenue in New York. The author put pen to paper and phrased a highly detailed advertisement to ensure he would be found: ‘Large and intensely black; thick, velvety fur; has a faint fringe of white hair across his chest; not easy to find in ordinary light.’

The ad yielded immediate results. People soon lined up outside his door with black cats, but none of them perfectly matched his vivid description. However, in time, Bambino found his own way home.

## PROTECTOR OF HOME AND HEARTH

The expression ‘house cat’ denotes an individual who prefers to enjoy the peace and quiet of home over running around causing mischief on the town. These individuals are more or less introverted and content merely to exist, perhaps curling up on the couch with some lit candles and a cup of tea. For some, ‘house cat’ might mean somebody excruciatingly dull, who never

wants to do anything. Or even somebody who needs to ask their spouse's permission first.

For others, it might signify the very opposite: security.

Cats were once regarded as protectors of the home or the farmstead. Cats helped keep pests and rats away from the crops. On farms, cats lived in harmony with the other animals, sleeping on the backs of horses and cows, or finding a sunny spot on top of a haystack. In many urban homes, cats can be seen looking out through windows from windowsills, captivated by wonders like flies or the reflections of the light dancing on the sill, or just curiously observing life as it goes on outside.

Cats who live both indoors and outdoors, who are part of the family but also have lives outside the home, are freer and display more independence than indoor cats. At least that's our experience, and we've both had cats with both kinds of lifestyles.

An outdoor cat won't have the same need for a stimulating indoor environment as an indoor cat, who will need exercise spaces in the house or flat, as they never get to go outside. That's what life is like for cats in the city, where their owners are worried about letting them out into traffic or live too high up in the building to be able to let them out. Cats have yet to learn how to operate lifts... But who knows what solutions we might come up with in the future?

Outdoor cats and indoor cats alike take up a fair deal of space. We notice when they are around. It's as though their aura extends across a large space.

Pedigree cats are becoming increasingly popular, as is the practice of working from home. This brings about even closer interactions with our cats – it's far easier to share your cat's everyday experiences when you're living side by side.

Feng Shui practitioners claim that cats tease out the harmony in a home. According to this Chinese teaching, one should keep a black china cat facing north, to ward off evil. So much for black cats being bad luck!

## **STRONG IN SOLITUDE, STRONGER WITH A CAT**

Let's return to our researcher friend Dennis C. Turner now. As a trained ethologist specialising in animal behaviour, Dennis has particularly focused

on animal psychology, a subject which he also teaches to vets. He is seventy-two years old at the time of writing, and semi-retired, but he remains a professor at the veterinarian faculty of Zürich University.

His interest in cats dates back to childhood, when Dennis grew up in a suburb of San Diego. He had wanted a cat for as long as he could remember, but the odds were stacked against him. His mother was afraid of cats and his dad hated the neighbour's cats, who kept coming in and doing their business on the family's lawn.

'I had to put off cats until after I was married. When we moved to Switzerland, to a house in the country outside Zürich, we immediately purchased three cats. Mitzika, Simba – a ginger and brown beauty with tiger stripes, who lived for eighteen years before dying from a kidney infection – and then, Simba's sister Nila, who drowned in the neighbour's pool after just a year. It was terrible.'

'After Nila passed, we got Joy, our last cat, who died a few years ago.'

'We tried to turn Joy into an indoor cat when we moved to the flat, which flies in the face of everything I usually say when I'm teaching. For six months all was well, and then she developed cancer. Deciding to have her put to sleep was one of the most difficult things I've ever had to do. I held her as the vet gave her the injection. She walked a few steps across the floor before she collapsed, and I broke down completely. Since we knew that Joy would be our last cat, we had her cremated, and we've kept a small wooden urn with her remains in our flat.'

After writing his graduation paper on bats at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Dennis began his career in science in Zürich, where he was advised to specialise in wild animals. He was offered an opportunity to study lions in the Serengeti, but his funding wasn't sufficient to allow it. One morning, around that time, Dennis noticed how Mitzika got up from her quiet spot under the kitchen table, mewed, and wanted to go out into the garden. He was processing his frustration over the overseas adventure he'd missed out on at the time.

'I let Mitzika out, staring right at her, and said aloud, in resignation: "I suppose you'll have to be my lion..." And then: "Actually, come to think of it..."'

He decided to carry out a survey of past studies on cats with his students. They soon realised that there had only been a couple of pages written on the

social behaviour of cats. Most of the work involved how different kinds of felines hunted and killed their prey.

Dennis initiated a programme focusing on domestic cats and returned to the university in Zürich to continue his research and build his own cat colony. In total, thirty kittens were born in the colony, and they were studied up close for three years.

In the early 1990s, Dennis founded his private research and education institute, IEAP (Institute for Applied Ethology and Animal Psychology).

Dennis and his team have focused on studying cats' personalities and their need to withdraw. In collaboration with Gerulf Rieger, he carried out several studies of single households with cats, which were compiled of people living alone and their cats: *A Study of Human Mood and Subsequent Behaviour*. They carried out in-depth interviews and gathered data and observations from forty-seven women and forty-nine men, who all lived alone with their cats.

The most astonishing finding of their singles study was that women who lived alone with their cats more often formed deeper relationships with their cats than women who lived with partners. They established that singles with cats experienced bad moods less frequently than people who had both cats and significant others. After all, cats are rarely late for dinner, and they don't often leave the toilet seat up. They just hang out, triggering feel-good hormones.

Participants were asked to fill out a form twice: first at seven o'clock in the evening, and then again two hours later. In cases where the owners had interacted with their pets between survey rounds, there were marked improvements in their mood. The interaction might simply be the cat rubbing up against its owner's leg or making eye contact with them.

You might sense how little it can take for something somebody did to make you feel down on a grey day, or how easy it is to let worries overwhelm you when you run out of energy. But then there comes your cat, giving you a quick blink, and suddenly, everything seems not so bad. It's cat magic!

In today's society, loneliness and psychological issues are increasingly serious health challenges – we've seen an increase of several hundred per cent over the last few years, while an increasing number of people are getting cats and other pets.

Dennis nods in response to the question of whether there is a connection here.

‘Several studies have shown that cats and other pets come to play an even more important role in times of isolation. We can clearly see that the cat or the dog, in a way, are playing the role of a better half. Back in the late 1980s, my colleague Karin B. Stammbach and I ran a study in which we found that a cat can, in many ways, replace a partner when it comes to the social value a cat has in comparison to a human being. People who have large social networks also enjoy the closeness they share with their cats. Seventy-five to ninety per cent of cat owners think of their pets as family members. If a cat gets lost, it won’t take long for missing notices to be posted on lamp posts all around the neighbourhood. We also noted that cats are often mentioned in obituaries, although this is more common in, say, the USA, than it is in Switzerland.’

The study he just ran with Sara Platto was an exploration of this very phenomenon.

Unlike dogs, cats aren’t inherently social animals. Cats are feral by nature. But today, when they grow up in security among cats and humans, and don’t have to leave their mothers until they’re ten or twelve weeks old, they’re much more socially oriented. This also means that the cats themselves require social interactions, and in this context, we humans – according to Dennis C. Turner – simply can’t substitute for another cat. That’s why Dennis always recommends getting two cats, especially if you’re going to be keeping them indoors.

#### **FIVE REASONS WHY YOU’LL FEEL BETTER WITH A CAT IN YOUR HOME**

- 1. Having cats in your home will relieve your anxiety and worries.** Gerulf Reiger is a researcher who discovered that the mere presence of a cat, even without actual interaction, can prevent negative emotive states, like anxiety, depression, fear, and introversion. In a major study, cat owners were compared with people who had owned cats until just recently, and a significant difference was observed in terms of mood swings and negative emotions.
- 2. Cats elevate the aesthetic dimension.** Cats are highly elegant, and this shows in everything from

their expressions to their patterns of movement.

**3. Cats are quiet and spread calm when they purr.**

They don't disturb anyone and they're mostly quiet when they're not purring. Their purring can calm you, and probably the cat, too - it goes both ways. When you arrive home and meet your cat's gaze in the hall, greeting you with a slow blink, this will also have a calming effect on you. Basically, you'll have an easier time relaxing in the solace of your own home, after a long day's work, for instance.

**4. Your cat encourages you to reflect on your life.**

Cat owners, women in particular, reflect a lot on their cats and on their own identities. Studies indicate that merely seeing their cat can trigger this reflective behaviour.

**5. Cats make us feel less alone.** In times of

loneliness or isolation, cats are proven to be beneficial partners. They can even be better for you than other humans<sup>2</sup>.

## CLEANING AND SELF-CARE

Carina doesn't think of herself as pedantic, far from it, but she does feel that she's literally gotten her house in better order since Mia and Magnum moved in. They raised the style factor significantly.

'Maybe it's because I've been subconsciously seeing them cleaning themselves and always trying to scrape the sand together when it moves around in the box. Not that they do it with any great success, but still. And the way they pose so elegantly in the windows! They're just like little royalty, as Twain so accurately described it.'

This inspired Carina to do more to keep her home tidy. She couldn't keep her cats in a messy home, could she?

'I go to the effort of vacuuming an extra time because it just keeps accumulating. I also try to unpack my suitcase right away, rather than have it all lie there for days. Although they do like to lie in it. The cats inspired me to lead a cleaner life.'

There is a ritual quality, something soothing, about watching cats clean themselves. Believe it or not, an adult cat spends up to half its waking time grooming and improving its appearance; they even seem to enjoy it. Many of them purr while they lick themselves clean, and cat mothers begin licking their kittens immediately after birth, to stimulate them to urinate and defecate. When they are four to five months old, they begin cleaning themselves, as well as their siblings and mothers. Their mutual grooming continues into adulthood, when it becomes a social activity that strengthens the bond between two cats.

Books about tidying have been topping the bestseller lists in recent years, with Japanese cleaning and organising guru Marie Kondo leading the way for a whole coterie of role models and authors. It's obvious that purging, cleansing, and caring for ourselves and our homes can help us feel good.

Kondo's KonMari empire produces stylish cleaning and laundry products that cats would probably love, considering their habitual natures and excellent personal hygiene. They are equipped with coarse tongues that almost work like loofah scrubbers, and soft front paws that they can wet with saliva, like flannels, for their daily morning wash. When something sticks to their fur, they won't give in; they are fully prepared to use their teeth.

Recently Marie Kondo posted a picture to Instagram in which a cat was resting in a pink laundry basket. The writing read: 'It's official! Cats love the KonMari method.' In all likelihood, most cat owners have already noticed that cats love to lie down in the laundry basket, or, even better, on top of a pile of clean laundry – they'll sleep there all day if you'll let them!

Animal lovers have posted their tips for how they've uncluttered their stuffed toy collections and tidied up all their nooks and crannies. All this is done in accordance with the well-established Kondo method, which involves lining up all your stuff and slowly feeling out which objects genuinely spark joy in you. Everything else goes in the rubbish. After this you have to organise the remaining, chosen objects in the most appealing way you can.

## CAT HAIR KNITTING

Something that will almost certainly follow a cat into your home is lots and lots of cat hair, in every last corner of your home. Two long-haired Siberian cats have brought Carina's inner cleaning lady to the forefront. She vacuums an extra time every week and makes sure to always have easy access to a lint roller, which can pick up all the hairs thanks to its sticky surface. The hairs end up everywhere: on beds, inside covers (satin is the worst!), on rugs, and on and inside couches and armchairs. It's not a lot of fun. Irene Lerman saw this dilemma and decided to start making wool from cat hair. She recently shared this new trend with the world in the British newspaper *The Guardian*. She was born in the Soviet Union, and her mother taught her to knit when she was still a child, but it wasn't until she reached adulthood and adopted a Ragdoll who loved to be brushed that the idea came to her. 'Mittens had such beautiful fur, so rather than throw out the tufts that stuck to the brush, I began to collect them. In the end, I had a whole shoebox full of them. That's when I began to think about whether it would make good knitting wool.'

Irene found some YouTube videos and learned to spindle wool from cat hair. Dog hair also works well, as she discovered when a friend brought her a bag of hair from her English Setter. Her creativity began to flow, and now, she has her own workshop, to which people have begun to bring the hair they've gathered from their loved ones, so it can be turned into anything from pillowcases to handbags. Fifty to one hundred grams is enough to make a small object. One woman asked if Irene could make a plush toy from the hairs of her dead cat. When she received this unusual object, she placed it in her bed, and then she had the first good night's sleep she'd had since the cat died.

To our delight, there are actually health benefits to be gained from cat hair. Cat fur picks up a lot of dust, dandruff, and mites, and this makes the people nearby less likely to develop allergies and asthma. Assuming, of course, that you're not allergic to cats to begin with.

## **ROUTINES, RITUALS, AND SETTING BOUNDARIES**

Sleeping, eating, playing, using the litter box or going outside, washing, taking a nap, sitting at a window looking out, resting on somebody's lap on

the couch... and then, starting the whole cycle over again: sleeping, eating, playing... Many find routines and life rhythms fascinating, and both these spheres have become somewhat endangered by our technological, ever-connected society, where working hours are consuming an increasing amount of what we call our leisure time. Cats and dogs can both help us out here. In 2019, researcher Sara Platto trained cat breeders to help them better understand and respond to the psychological needs of cats, such as their need for a private space. Cats' need for privacy is a core trait. A large portion of a cat's life is private, a secret world, while dogs, for their part, are raised to spend time around human beings, and interact with them as much as they possibly can.

'Misunderstandings are common here. I often hear people say that cats are solitary animals, but that's simply not true. Cats have the same social needs that dogs have, only in a different way. You have to play and interact with a cat on the cat's own terms.'

Many tell of how both cats and dogs can help shape their days and introduce better routines into our lives. In the story about Heathcliff the cat (named after the character in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*), American author Lloyd Alexander tells us how a large, abandoned furry cat began to frequent his house after he gave it food one day. There was already a cat living in the house, and the family wasn't planning on getting any more. However, as Alexander writes: 'I hadn't yet realised that the needs of a cat lover can be expanded indefinitely.'

Who doesn't know that feeling? The longing for another cat, for even more love.

After repeated requests Heathcliff was allowed to move in, and the only person he formed any attachment to was Lloyd. Their love, though, was boundless. However, the cat didn't approve of Lloyd's unusual working hours. As he was a writer and translator, he often worked long into the night and then spent long mornings in bed. The large male responded to this by making a point of coming crashing down on Lloyd's bed before sunrise each day.

Suddenly, Lloyd found himself sitting at his desk at six o'clock in the morning and getting to bed earlier in the evenings.

To top it off, the cat introduced a compulsory, shared afternoon nap. Around half past three in the afternoon, Heathcliff would curl up and fall asleep on the writer's lap. 'There wasn't much I could achieve with

Heathcliff stretched out across my knees, and he looked so comfortable that it began to seem like a pretty good idea to me, too. This is how Heathcliff and I began to take our one-hour siestas together. I gradually adjusted my daily schedule and began taking my meals at more conventional times. I had just as much time for my work as before, and Janine (Lloyd's wife) and Heathcliff were both a lot happier than before.'

## SLOWING DOWN

Cats can help us look up from our computer screens, peer out the window, and see a bird flying by, or notice the rain that's slowly trickling down the windowpane. Natural presence and boundary setting are abilities that seem to have been largely lost to modern humans.

'Cats teach us to slow down,' Sara tells us. 'They sit there, looking at you, in a state of absolute calm. This calm is contagious, too. Unlike dogs, cats need privacy, and they respect human boundaries more than dogs do. They tend not to bother to do as we say, and their routines and the boundaries they set can help us feel better. The Chinese need to learn more about this; they really should try treating cats less like something to be exhibited and more like an intelligent animal that's worthy of study.'

She gives us a happy account of her Saturdays in the flat in Wuhan when she is off from work. She tells us how her cat Gingy helps her unwind, lies down by her side to purr, and encourages her to stay in bed with her coffee cup, rather than scrambling out of bed to take on every last thing that needs to be done.

'Cats have the ability to lose themselves, as if they were meditating. They are very meditative animals. They can be close, even just a metre away, as long as they feel secure – and they reveal this in different ways, including blinking. Your relationship with a cat will differ from the relationship you would have with a dog. Cats are more spiritual, and more introverted – they carry it all around inside them. That's why not everybody understands cats. Dogs are more extraverted.' You can communicate non-verbally with your cat. You will learn to be reflective and occupy your own space.

'There's no need to be close by, or in physical contact, all the time,' Sara emphasises. 'On the contrary, I think we would all do well to try to better respect one another's boundaries. When a cat sits still, blinking, this is an

intimate display. An ordinary blink of the eyes means, 'I'm OK.' If a cat closes its eyes slowly and presses them shut that means, 'I love you.' This can be said even from a distance.'

Her colleague in Switzerland, Dennis C. Turner, agrees. He's often asked why cats seem to prefer to approach people who don't like cats.

'If you're afraid, you'll be more or less frozen in place, and this will entice the cat to walk up to you and try to get a reaction. Previous studies of domestic cats have established that the cat's eyes, and the size of its pupils, reveal a lot about its emotional state. If you meet your cat's gaze, you will often receive a slow blink in response, which indicates that the cat is happy, and not concerned about anything. This also seems to have a calming effect on human beings. If, on the other hand, a person the cat doesn't know is staring at it, this could make it nervous. A fearful person evades eye contact, and this will trigger the cat to try to find out what's going on. Cats are often seen as curious, largely because of their predatory natures, as they need to be on the lookout for prey when they live in the wild. Any novel stimuli, such as unexpected sounds, sudden movements, or grass swaying in the wind or powerful gusts, will catch the cat's attention.'

Dennis's own research, which has been carried out in labs, cat colonies, and as surveys given to more than six hundred cat-owning households in Switzerland, has revealed that when comparing indoor cats and outdoor cats, we find that indoor cats tend to engage in far more regular interactions with the people in the household. 'We've considered whether this might come down to indoor cats viewing their owners as sources of stimulation, which they would have been receiving outdoors otherwise. However, the length of the interaction is always up to the cat. We can walk up to a cat and stroke it, but the cat decides how long it wants to stay for. If you let the cat control your interactions, you'll end up having more of them.'

## **SETTING BOUNDARIES: THE ROAD TO A HEALTHY LIFE RHYTHM**

One of the most obvious traits of cats is their need for privacy. According to Dennis C. Turner, all cats need a space of their own of some kind, ideally a room of their own, which they can retreat to when they don't want to be disturbed by other cats or humans. Who can't identify with that? The need

for a little nook of your own, where you can roll out your yoga mat, or perhaps a carpentry workshop, or a greenhouse – a place where you can close out the outside world. We all need to be ourselves for a moment, just like cats do, but failing to prioritise that need is a common mistake.

Cats also help us get more rest. Even if you don't need to unwind for as long as your cat, who sleeps more than half the time, perhaps you do need to take more breaks? Spend five minutes relaxing on the couch before rushing off to deal with the next task on your daily agenda. Perhaps you should set a timer to tell you when it's time to take a break, if your body isn't giving you the cues you need.

Cats also set boundaries in relation to food. They have sensitive immune systems, and because of this, they are cautious about what they eat. 'A dog will eat any crap it finds in the street, but a cat won't do that,' says Sara Platto.

Cats are independent animals who don't apologise for taking up space, or for ensuring that their bodily needs are met – all to keep their internal systems functioning at top capacity. If you have an indoor cat, you might enjoy studying the cat's routines – its sleep, play, and movement patterns – to see if there is anything it does that might have health benefits for you, too.

During one of our morning walks, when this book was still developing, we began to talk about the importance of good routines and how an excessive number of routines can produce a health obsession.

Ulrica explained that the idea of fixed routines made her uncomfortable. She felt that she tended to end up feeling guilty whenever she wasn't following the strict regime she set for herself; the lists of everything she had to do and eat and stick to religiously. Instead, she's decided that flexibility is more important to her. Like a cat, she looks for a billowing, dynamic everyday experience. Rhythm, rather than routine, such as getting your exercise done in smaller doses throughout the day if there's no time for a long two-hour session. Making space for rest, as well as for unplanned play.

Our lives look different at different times, depending on the seasons and the phases of our lives. Nobody wants to be a machine. It's better to connect the ability to the need, rather than just listen to demands and expectations. Focus on being present and finding a wise rhythm to follow through your day.

## ‘A CAT FILLS A ROOM’

When a cat is sleeping in a room, there’s not really that much work left for a decorator to do.

Swedish interior decorator and TV personality Ernst Kirchsteiger has always been a huge cat lover, and the much-shared quote above probably owes a great deal to that fact. Until just a few years ago, he and his family had a ginger farm cat called Gottfrid. ‘An imposing spirit in a less imposing body,’ is Ernst’s own description of Gottfrid. ‘Cats have so much closeness and tenderness to offer, and this is reflected in any home where they live. A cat reaches far beyond itself; it surrounds itself with a whole sphere of homeliness, calm, and excellent aesthetics. The way a cat moves its body, sleeps, and stretches makes each an incredibly beautiful act. Gottfrid taught me that there are many large things, even within a confined space. A cat fills a space.’

Ernst has become famous thanks to both his artistic talent and his philosophy on life. Among other subjects, he has preached the importance of alone time. Ideally, you should spend it staring off into nothingness. Like a cat.

‘I’m good at it. We all need time to reflect. What do you want? I don’t have the time – that’s the kind of thing a cat might seem to be saying when you approach. It’s busy tending to its own affairs. It thinks for itself, unlike a dog, which has simply internalised a reward system. A dog will often be more direct, and more demanding, while a cat will offer a mild, tentative kind of love, which is a little like a human first love. Sometimes, we might even feel a little hurt that the cat refuses to do as we say. But whenever I see a cat staring out through a window, I am curious to know what it might be thinking. I wish I could see a thought bubble appear next to them. I think they have rich inner lives.’

During his childhood in Degerfors in Värmland, Ernst had a cat, Pelle, who sent the whole family reeling when he suddenly disappeared and then kept out of sight for a full year.

‘We did a lot of anxious looking out through the window. Mom was sad, everybody was so sad. But then, one day, there was Pelle, in among the rhubarb. He looked happy. God only knew where he had been. He’d made some kind of long trek. I remember how we shouted: “Pelle!” It was as though we’d witnessed someone’s return from the dead. We felt such

incredible relief. He never gave even the slightest in the way of explanation.’ The Kirchsteiger family has almost always lived in the countryside, where cats are almost as much of a necessity as they are a benefit. Or, as Ernst puts it: ‘A house with a mouse needs its cat...’ However, it would be some time before they got their own.

The story of how Gottfrid came to the Kirchsteigers is something of a fairy tale in its own right.

One day, a colleague of Ernst’s from IKEA, who was also a decorator and whom Ernst had befriended when they both worked there, told him that she had lost her cat. The cat had been missing for half a year, and both she and her daughter presumed it must be dead and would never be coming back. One day, they read an article in the newspaper Nerikes Allehanda about a care home in Hallsberg, which was many miles away from their home. In the picture, they saw a sweet old lady in an armchair, who was holding a ginger cat in her arms. The caption read: ‘Does anybody know this beautiful ginger cat?’

Hold on, the decorator thought, isn’t that my cat? It looks a lot like him, anyway!

We’ll get back to why care homes seem to hold such an attraction for cats in the next chapter, but for now, we can simply state that it probably wasn’t a coincidence that he went where he went. Sometimes, cats need a bigger mission in life than hunting mice or lying around purring in the safety of the home.

Gottfrid came home. However, her relief wouldn’t last long. The decorator met a guy who was allergic to cats. The guy took priority over the cat. What would she do with Gottfrid, now? Ernst raised his hand.

‘Essentially, then, Gottfrid had been on a journey before he came into our home, but he soon became a natural part of our lives. There was a state of coexistence.

‘That’s how I view cats: they choose if they want to coexist or not. You can never be quite sure how they’re envisioning the future.’ Gottfrid marched right into the Kirchsteiger home and soon became hugely important to everybody. He got comfortable on Ernst’s desk and came over to interfere while Ernst was writing.

‘When I write, paint, or create in other ways, I often play music to help myself find my way into the work. Similarly, a cat can help me enter a more creative mode. Gottfrid teased it out of me, as though he had a creative key

to my own inner locks. I can really see why cats have enjoyed a more exalted position, historically speaking, and this has been made evident by the mummified cats that have been found in Egyptian tombs.'

His children also made a new friend.

'Our son Sebastian and Gottfrid had a very touching relationship, in which the cat almost acted as a therapist. They would hide themselves away in his room and start discussing important matters in there. The cat offers so much closeness and affection. My wife, Ulla, used to dislike cats. When she grew up, her mother used to chase their cat with a broom. But Gottfrid broke through Ulla's barriers and taught her something about love.'

Ernst is also fascinated, as are we, by the life rhythms of cats. How cats teach us to get deeper rest, as well as to reflect on things and stare off into space and to take an extra nap when we need it.

'Research has shown that we humans are finding it increasingly difficult to get proper rest. The cat tells us how to relax with every aspect of our being. Just imagine that a cat you could buy for 10 SEK from some farmer somewhere can actually help improve your health! I remember coming home after a tough day at work, and the cat coming to greet me. Of course, I sat down on the couch, and reasoned for a while, almost telepathically at times. It's not as though you have to utter the words. All you need to do is gaze into a cat's inscrutable eyes, and you will be immediately transported. And then, there is the way they purr... that little engine kicking into gear. Basically, cats add a lot of magic to our lives. They're amazing animals, amazing!' According to Feng Shui, Curry lines and the points where they cross explain why some people feel particularly anxious in certain places or corners. Science is sceptical of this theory, as there is not currently a way to measure any observations related to it, but the experience nonetheless seems like an obvious truth to many. For example, you shouldn't position your bed where Curry lines cross each other.

'A cat will always choose the best corner, the one that we humans would also feel the best in. They have something of an internal compass, and they're able to indicate which areas of the room have the best energies,' Ernst explains. 'It's a matter of how objects and materials relate to one another. I haven't read a single line about Feng Shui, but I still have a sense for that stuff. Perhaps aesthetics have been elevated further in Asia than in Scandinavia – it's an exciting area to explore.'

Gottfrid lived to be ten years old. Today, Ernst and his wife Ulla have a dog, Sherman, who they take care of for their son, Ludvig. However, they miss having a cat, and Ernst is hoping that they will get a new one eventually, although they still have some work to do before they'll be ready to move on after Gottfrid's death. Gottfrid suddenly grew very skinny and started to stagger across the kitchen floor. He would sit down in a corner, barely seeming to know how to leave it. At that point Ulla, who had a long career as an enrolled nurse behind her, and Ernst both began to sense that his time was running out, and they made an appointment with a vet. Gottfrid was given a tranquiliser shot before the final injection was administered. However, he died before that was necessary, as the tranquiliser was enough to send him off on his final rest.

‘His life force had almost gone completely. There was very little left. But we felt that we were doing the responsible thing. I don’t think cats appreciate themselves very much when they can no longer control their bodies. It was a dignified end. And now, Gottfrid’s memory lives on. Every year, on All Hallows’ Eve, we set out a lit candle on his grave. I’ve marked the spot where he rests by engraving his name on the rock up by the stone wall in our garden, where he always used to love to lie in the sun. This means that he is still present in our home, that he’s still with us. He was the ultimate cat. Whenever we spot a ginger cat, if we’re driving somewhere in our car or something, we all call out together: Gottfrid!’ There is a stable cat who sneaks around near Ernst’s house; he’s a bit of a vagabond who comes and goes as he sees fit. Some days, though, he’s incredibly affectionate and when this happens Ernst takes the opportunity to spend some time with him.

‘I’m happy to spend time with cats, whenever I have the opportunity, and when our lives quiet down a little more, I’m very much looking forward to inviting a new cat into our home.’

#### SETTING BOUNDARIES: GOOD ROUTINES TO LEARN FROM YOUR CAT

- **Rest more.** Crawl up on your couch or in your bed and take a nap. Don’t just keep going without resting in the mistaken belief that this will make you productive. Cats sleep sixteen to eighteen hours a day, if you count all the naps. There’s no need for you

to sleep or rest that much, but you probably do need to do more of it than you think.

- **Stare off into space.** Not into your phone's screen. Stare right in front of you, into a wall, or out of a window. Rest your gaze on the horizon. Take in all the hues of nature outside.
- **Be present in your own space.** Meditate more! Set boundaries. You don't need to be always refilling and taking in more external experiences.
- **Purge.** A cat vomits up anything it doesn't want to keep. Could you apply that same attitude to your home? Give it away, throw it away, purge! Make room for your thoughts, for socialising, and for all the other important stuff.

1. From *Notebook* by Mark Twain.

2. Source: Dennis C. Turner, ethologist and cat researcher.

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# CARINA

## Cats Make Home Feel Even More Like a Home



*I open the door between the bedroom and the living room and laugh immediately. I have to stop myself mid-step, to keep from stepping right onto them. Like two small Egyptian statues, they're standing there in the morning light. Their green eyes bore right through me. It's eight o'clock on a Sunday, and they appear to feel that I've slept in much too long. I wonder how long they've been waiting patiently like this for me to wake up.*

*I receive a hungry mew as a good morning from Magnum, and both of them start to run figure eights around my legs, causing me to more or less stumble through the bathroom doorway. I ask them nicely to please wait outside, but Mia sneaks in quickly, as if to make sure I'm not secretly planning on going back to bed. By the time she's trying to squeeze in behind the washing machine, I'm fully awake. Magnum scratches at the door outside.*

*To think, just over a year ago, I had a home with no cats! It must have been such an empty place. The happiness these two creatures bring is evident in every room; their toys, climbing trees, and bedding are spread out all over the place, a bit like when we had little children.*

*They're jumping up and down by the time I finally reach the kitchen. I give them food and clean water and empty their litter boxes. After that, they play happily, chasing each other around the flat a couple of times, before finding spots to lie in the sun. She perches in the window, peacefully gazing out over the balcony, her eyes following a leaf in the wind, and a seagull hovering way overhead. Magnum, for his part, nests down on his favourite corner of the living room rug, with his head resting on a meditation pillow. I wonder to myself how it is that cats make a house feel even more like a*

*home. How they unhesitatingly follow an unwritten, flexible schedule, moving around between their various resting and lookout spots: the living room window, the bed, the couch, the t-shirt rack in my wardrobe, my son's room, my office... and how they're able to make me feel even more at home. All the time, they communicate to me that everything is fine just the way it is.*

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# ULRICA

## ‘Damn Cat!’



*A month had gone by. We were waiting for a new liver to arrive for Magnus. Our anticipation was increasing daily, and we kept our phones on at all times in case our coordinator would call. Our bags were packed, and Magnus and I went over all the important paperwork; a will was made up, and I asked him how he would like to be buried, in case the worst happened.*

*We prepared the children for the dangers bit by bit, but we also visualised our dreams for what we would do after the liver transplant succeeded. We made a mood board with dream images of the future, we made fun stuff up together when Magnus had the energy, and we spent more time with each other. We wanted to stock up on memories for the future – just in case.*

*Magnus went for walks with our dog Hamilton, snuggled with the cats, did some exercise when he had the energy, and did all the handiwork he could manage at our country house. He also began building a scale model of a German icebreaker, just to clear his mind. He went to his hobby workshop several times a week to file, paint, and glue all those tiny pieces together into a boat. One night, he brought the foundations of the upper deck home to leave it out on the balcony to cure. First, though, he rested it on a couple of boxes in the living room. Right next to the boxes was a drying rack full of laundry, where Bore was sleeping just then.*

*I went out into the kitchen to make some tea while Magnus and Edgar got ready for their goodnight story. I heard Edgar say, ‘Wow! Bore’s jumping high. He’s up in the bookshelf, now.’ Then, he closed the bedroom door, and Magnus started reading.*

*That’s when we heard it: the big crash.*

*I ran out into the living room and saw that Bore had jumped down from the bookshelf onto the boat model, which was now in pieces all over the floor.*

*Magnus came running from Edgar's bedroom, looked at what remained of his 300 hours of building, and shrieked: 'NO! Damn cat!'*

*He stormed off into the hall, put on his clothes and shoes, and slammed the door shut behind him. I hurried after him, but he called to me from the stairwell to tell me he wanted to be left alone and that he would call me in a while.*

*One hour later I received a text message telling me he had gone out to clear his head. But he wouldn't feed or touch Bore for at least three months.*

*'But Magnus, Bore didn't do it on purpose,' I said, trying to console him.*

*'I know that, but it doesn't matter to me right now. I need some time before I can move on and look him in the eyes again.'*

*After three months he picked Bore up in his arms again, but he didn't finish the icebreaker until about six months after he received his new liver. The model took 500 hours to make and the accident actually ended up making the final result better, at least according to Magnus.*

# CHAPTER 7

## WILDCAT

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*God has made the cat to give man the pleasure of caressing the tiger.*

Victor Hugo

The saying ‘look what the cat dragged in’ suggests that somebody just made an unexpected entrance, or that somebody has brought something ugly, unnecessary, or worthless home without even realising it. It’s often used ironically. The expression was coined at some point in the early 20th century, probably around the time when cats began to live indoors as opposed to out in the barn.

Those of us who have cats are very aware of how much they like to bring their kills home to show them off to their owners.

Cats who mostly live indoors often play at hunting. Their toys might be anything from an old sock to a squeaky toy mouse, a piece of aluminium foil, string, or balls of paper. Hunting provides exercise and helps them maintain their health alongside all the cuddles, food, and rest.

Cats have strong wills, and they unashamedly help themselves to what they want. Do you want the best spot in the home? You’ll have to move the cat, then. Their feral nature is instinctive.

## UNIQUE BEINGS

We’re all unique individuals. One person might be tall, and another person might be short. Someone might be quiet, and someone else might be talkative. We feel differently about things, react to different things, and we all have different personal energy levels. The same is true of cats. One is a house cat; the other is more of a wildcat. They’re all unique, but their personalities remain fairly consistent throughout their lives. None of the cats we’ve met have been the same as any others – they all have individual personalities. Just as we humans are each individually unique. There will never be another person like you, and there has never been another person like you. The cool thing about cats is that they don’t go to great lengths to

fit in, and they don't apologise for who they are. There's something natural about cats that is easy to admire and learn from.

Some cats end up in bad situations where they are not treated well and they end up becoming withdrawn and having to endure appalling conditions. When this happens they tend to respond with aggression. Regardless of their individual fates all cats are phenomenal survivors. They always land on their feet. Perhaps this is because they are programmed to live, experience, survive, and seek pleasure?

An example of the incredible anatomy of cats is the righting reflex, which is triggered whenever a cat falls. When the cat is upside down, an automatic rotation reaction is triggered. First, it rotates its head and raises its forelegs to protect its face. Next, the spine twists, and the hind legs are bent, to ensure all four legs will be prepared for landing. Just before touching down, the cat extends its legs and bends its back to weaken the impact. Throughout the fall, the tail rotates to act as a counterweight.

The whole process is incredibly quick – one eighth of a second, according to the experts who have timed it. Their field of study is the incredible agility of cats, which combines with their excellent sense of orientation to inform their brains of how their bodies are positioned in relation to the ground.

To feel good, we need to do the same things cats do: challenge our mobility, and practice landing on our feet.

### **YOGA EXERCISE: CAT-COW**

#### *BE AS AGILE AS A CAT*

'You're only as old as your spine' according to a famous proverb from the East. When we care for and cultivate the strength and suppleness of our spinal column, this will also increase our appreciation for the unique capacities of our souls.

This exercise is a common element in most yoga classes, as it warms us up from the inside, and stimulates our circulation quickly.

1. Kneel on all fours.
2. Plant your toes on the floor, gently tilt your pelvis forward, draw your sternum forward, and retract your scapulas while inhaling.

3. Push the backs of your feet towards the floor and, as you exhale, gently bow your head and arch your back like a cat.
4. Focus your gaze on your nose. Follow it upward as you inhale, and downward as you exhale.
5. Allow your inhalation and exhalation to set the rhythm of your movements.
6. Repeat five times.

## PELLE SVANSLÖS

A childhood memory shared by many in Sweden is reading the books about Pelle Svanslös (Peter No-Tail), a kitten who had his tail bitten off by a rat, followed his curiosity into a car, fell asleep, and ended up living with a family in the city of Uppsala. Pelle is described as an incredibly friendly kitty, and most children reading the books probably experience some mild outrage over the poor treatment he is subjected to. How could the city cats Måns, Bill, and Bull be so cruel to Pelle and bully him, just because he was a little different and didn't have a tail?

It's easy to empathise with Pelle, who is merely seeking to survive in a situation where he fails to gain the acceptance of the group. However, it's also encouraging to see him stand up for himself, and to see how his friend Maja Gräddnos (Maya Cream-nose) takes his side. It's interesting to note that Måns is always looking for shortcuts, and mimics the approaches others have taken, while Pelle goes his own way. He never apologises for who he is. As a cat owner, it can sometimes be challenging to get the cats to get along when the family grows. Being present while they get to know each other can help. You should also make room for them to feel secure in their new home and with their new family members.

There is a bit of Pelle inside each and every one of us and we all need to feel free to be happy. We're all wildcats deep inside, to some extent. The wildcat is the stripe we just can't lose. We might think we've washed it off, but we still have all these unique stripes, which all relate to our need for freedom. Like cats, we don't need to ask permission to be who we are.

What might we gain, then, from connecting with this wilder, freer part of ourselves? Perhaps our cats can help us find the things that make us unique.

### FELIS CATUS

The domestic cat is a subspecies of the wildcat, *Felis silvestris*, and was classified as *Felis catus* by the Swedish physician, biologist, and botanist Carl Linnaeus, who, it must be said, didn't think much of cats. He preferred dogs and other animals. In his home in Uppsala he kept a monkey named Diana and a raccoon named Sjupp. Like many other animal experts at the time, he was firmly convinced that anybody who kept a cat in their bed would either fall ill or run the risk of having their eyes clawed out.

## WILDCATS AND DOMESTIC CATS

Our modern domestic cats hail from both the African wildcat (*Felis silvestris lybica*) and the European wildcat (*Felis silvestris silvestris*).

The domestic cat differs from the wildcat in terms of temperament, fur, size of paw, and tooth alignment, and they are also less resistant to certain viral blood cancer infections. The domestic cat, however, is sufficiently closely related to certain Asian breeds of wild felines to be able to produce at least partially fertile offspring in crossbreeding. Such crossings do not occur in nature, however, although some cat breeds, such as the Bengal, have resulted from intentional crossbreeding of this kind. The matter is further confused by the fact that domestic cats born in the wild, or who have turned feral, are sometimes incorrectly labelled 'wildcats'.

China is one of many nations that has an abundance of wildcats (as well as leopards and tigers), feral domestic cats and wild dogs, which are all treated as pests and commonly shot. There is also a long tradition of serving them as food for humans, a subject of significant controversy, particularly since the beginning of the pandemic. In May 2020, Shenzhen became the first Chinese city to outlaw the sale of cat and dog meat, with the justification that these animals are more closely related to humans as pets today. In total in Asia, ten million dogs and four million cats are slaughtered

for food each year, but most Chinese still say they have never eaten dog or cat meat. Now, discussions are underway to ban the practice everywhere.

## **ANIMALS WITH HUMAN TRAITS**

In the Stone Age, people believed that the animals they encountered were more like humans than we now know them to be, and that they only behaved like animals when humans were nearby. Projecting a human personality onto animals is called anthropomorphism and represented a way for hunters to enter into the mindset of the animal, to think more like they do. It also wasn't unusual for this anthropomorphism to take a different expression, in which humans emulated the animals they wanted to get closer to. This is what Palaeolithic and Mesolithic hunters were doing when they dressed up as the animals they were hunting, like reindeer and elk. In the mid-20th century, researchers felt that this humanisation of animals was deplorable. The idea is more accepted today, and anthropomorphism is quite a common trope in books, comics, and films.

## **CATS WHO MADE HISTORY**

Some claim that cats can help us pick up on details that are invisible to the naked eye. Things we didn't even know we were looking for.

Take scientist and inventor Nikola Tesla (who is most famous for discovering alternating current). In a letter he wrote to a friend in 1939 he tells of his cat, Mačak, who entered Tesla's life when he was still a child, and immediately became his best friend:

‘In the dusk of the evening as I stroked Mačak’s back, I saw a miracle which made me speechless with amazement. Mačak’s back was a sheet of light, and my hand produced a shower of crackling sparks loud enough to be heard all over the house... I cannot exaggerate the effect of this marvellous night on my childish imagination. Day after day I have asked myself, what is electricity?’

Another wildcat who made the history books is the cat known as Room 8.

In 1952, a wildcat wandered into room 8 of the Elysian Heights Elementary School in California. The children loved the cat so much that they named it after their classroom. Room 8 lived in the school during the semesters, when he was cared for by the faculty and students. In the summertime, he would head off, only to return when classes began again. Room 8 became immensely popular and received up to one hundred pieces of fan mail every day at the school, right up to his death in the mid-1960s.

Like many famous authors and creatives, Pablo Picasso felt that cats were muses of his. He was a friend of all animals and didn't like to work in the studio without his animals: a monkey, a dog, a domesticated mouse, a turtle, an owl, and several cats (his favourite breed was Siamese). In a letter to a friend he mentions how he didn't like to let adults into his studio, as they often broke things or made cryptic comments that annoyed him. Instead, he claimed that cats and children were the only ones who understood his work and never broke anything. They were always welcome. Leonardo da Vinci, too, was inspired by cats. His drawing The Virgin and Christ child with a cat, which is held by The British Library in London, is presumed to depict the baby Christ playing with a cat.

## **A STREET CAT NAMED BOB**

The story of the street cat Bob is a fascinating tale (which became both a book and a film) of how a human and a cat can save each other's lives.

James Bowen was a man whose life had taken a wrong turn since he came to London from Australia with big dreams of finding success as a musician. He suffered one setback after another and ended up badly addicted to heroin.

In 2007, he had managed to get himself a small flat and was trying to find some meaning in his life. He was desperately trying not to succumb to his addiction and making a humble living as a busker. One day, he noticed an injured ginger street cat crouching near the house where he lived. The next day, the cat was still there, and James began to wonder who it belonged to. He took him in and fed him. He asked around to see if his neighbours might know who the cat belonged to, but nobody seemed to know. Out of instinct, he took care of the cat until he seemed to have recovered and then let him out. He named him Bob.

Bob began to follow James around, and soon the two were inseparable. Their varied, amusing, and occasionally dangerous adventures ended up changing both their lives and slowly healing their wounds from the past. James got clean and made a new start in life. All thanks to Bob.

### COOL CATS

*Everybody wants to be a cat,  
Because a cat's the only cat  
who knows where it's at.*

From the Disney film *Aristocats* (1970)

The 1970 film *Aristocats* is set in Paris in 1910, and tells the story of an elderly wealthy socialite, Madame Bonfamille, who lives alone with her female cat Duchess and her three little kittens Toulouse, Berlitz, and Marie. Madame Bonfamille has no friends or living relatives and thus spends all of her waking hours with her beloved cats. She has a dour manservant named Edgar, who helps Madame run her household.

One day, Madame asks her friend, the lawyer Georges, to visit her. She instructs him to change her will to ensure that her cats will inherit her fortune. When the cats die, any remaining funds are to be passed on to Edgar, the manservant.

Edgar overhears this conversation and decides that he'd rather not wait that long. He decides to kidnap the cats and make himself the sole heir. One morning he adds a sedative to their food, and once they've fallen asleep, he whiskers them away to the countryside outside Paris. However, Edgar's scheme is interrupted by two dogs called Lafayette and Napoleon, and he ends up having to leave Duchess and her three kittens in the wilderness. They are discovered by a wildcat, Thomas O'Malley, who helps them return to Paris. Edgar tries to kidnap them again, but Thomas comes to the rescue once more, along with his friends, the jazz-addicted alley cats and the mouse, Roqueforte. Together, they trap Edgar in a trunk and ship it off to Timbuktu.

The film ends happily when Thomas is adopted by Madame and becomes a father figure for the kittens.

## TORRES'S LONG JOURNEY HOME

In 2017, Linda Vikström and her husband Jan lived in Älmhult with their two children and their cats, Torres and Messi. When they visited Italy one summer, they left their cats to stay with friends in Halmstad. One day, Torres disappeared. Days went by and he didn't return. They were all beside themselves. Once they got back from their holiday, they posted missing notices and went looking for him, but they couldn't find Torres anywhere. They had to return to Älmhult without him, bringing just Messi back with them.

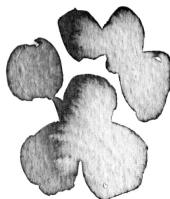
Two years later, they received word that Torres had been found. He had been identified thanks to the chip that had been implanted in him. He was found near Strömsnäsbruk, almost fifty miles from Halmstad, and not far from Älmhult. Apparently he had walked almost all the way home from Älmhult, and had done quite well to cover that ground in just two years; for a cat, anyway!

When Torres was reunited with his family on Lyckovägen, he was exhausted, and he couldn't move for days. All he did was lie around, panting. The vet helped them rehydrate him and made sure all his vitals were good. Afterwards, the Vikström-Nielsen family could finally relax. Their brave, incredible Torres had found his way home at last, and the story made the headlines of the local newspaper: 'Miracle Cat Torres Was Lost for Two Years.'

Linda recalls: 'Torres was a strong, independent individual, with a strong sense of personal integrity. He was no lap cat; he decided who he would spend time with, and when. I remember so well how, just after he had made it home after his adventure, and was beginning to recover, he crawled up and lay down on my chest, with his paw touching my cheek, as if to tell me: *I'm home again!*'

# ULRICA

## Clea the Wildcat



*It was July of 2020. My daughter Olivia and I were sitting on the porch of our little cabin in the countryside, enjoying a slow breakfast, while Magnus was hammering away at something or other in his workshop, which was some distance away, down the slope from the house. Our dog, Hamilton, was cheering him along. Bore sat by himself, a little apart from us, relishing the sun.*

*We looked at cute cat pictures online and found ourselves captivated by a series of pictures of cats that looked like leopards. We were fascinated by their powerful, feral appearance and their graceful anatomies, and we ended up googling Bengal cats to find out more. Olivia's eyes lit up as she devoured all the facts.*

*'Mum, I want my own cat! And I really want a Bengal. I know they're expensive, but it's soon my fifteenth birthday, and I could chip in with some of my savings.'*

*I told her that our family already had a perfect balance of family members, and that it wasn't the right time to add more animals to the family. Edgar, our son, walked out from the kitchen to comment: 'It is the right time. We have plenty of love to give.' The months went by, and during the autumn that followed, Olivia succumbed to depression as her school placed increasingly heavy demands on her and she worried about her friend, who had fallen ill. We spent a lot of time discussing things during that Christmas break. During one of our conversations, Olivia returned to the subject of having a cat of her own. She had researched the healing benefits caring for a cat brings, and how it could relieve anxiety and*

*depression, and she told us that she felt that having her own cat might help her find her way out of her current difficulties.*

*At first Magnus refused, and for practical reasons I wasn't in a position to say yes to the idea. The days went by, and I could tell that Olivia understood that she shouldn't press the issue. A few months later, we were looking at pictures from our trip to South Africa. A picture of a leopard mother with her two cubs moved us. She had been rescued from poachers a few years earlier and was now protected in the reserve we visited. We had seen her moving around the area in the distance, and her energetic, proud poise caught our attention. The picture sparked something in me, and when I looked up, I saw it in Magnus's eyes, too. Perhaps this was a sign that we should let some new energy into our lives?*

*Clea entered our home a few weeks later – a crazy, wild, Bengal girl, who managed to find a place in our family despite my previous misgivings. Olivia named her Clea, in honour of Cleo, the Birman we had before.*

*Clea brought a breath of fresh air along when she arrived. She climbed out of her travel basket and confidently pranced around the flat, familiarising herself with the lay of the land. Next, she climbed onto Olivia's bed and began to play. It felt like she'd always been there.*

*Clea plays with our dog Hamilton in a way he appreciates. She livens Bore up and Bore in turn makes her feel secure. She knocks things over, but only the ones we needed to get rid of anyway, and she demonstrates to us how we always have the choice of returning to laughter, happiness, and celebrating life and the things we already have.*

# CARINA

## It Feels Like a Life-And-Death Struggle



*Summer arrives. I go to the country and bring the cats along. Anders hasn't joined me this time, but as I have the support of my experienced cat-owner sister and mother, we've made the decision to always let Mia and Magnum come out here when we visit. All our friends who have indoor cats let them go outside in the summer. How difficult could it be?*

*Anders has already bought two GPS tracker collars. A rather expensive investment, as I accidentally clicked the two-year subscription option for both cats. I basically have to get some use out of those blasted collars now.*

*They've been outside on leashes before, and that's been perfectly fine. Mia mostly hung out in the rose bushes while Magnum watched. Sometimes she, who is the more restless of the two, seemed to want to head over to the blueberry bushes. It was time to put this to the test...*

*The GPS app seems to work. I let them out and hold my breath as I watch to see what will happen. My mother is ready to intervene if they should head off too far. It takes a few minutes, but then, they shoot off to the gnarliest, thorniest thicket you could imagine, ten yards back from the country road that runs through the common just below our house. What had I expected, though? Of course that's where they went. Then there's a car speeding towards us. Oh crap. I need to get them back. Now!*

*This was the worst idea ever. I can feel the panic mounting within me. My husband is practically dying. The oncologist told us last month that there was no hope, it's just a matter of time now. I came here to regroup for a few days. Am I going to end up killing one of my cats now?*

*The GPS app informs me: Mia has exited the virtual fence. There's nothing else to do and I head into the jungle, storming through the branches. I can feel the thorns tearing long scratches in my arms. There she*

*is, I have her! I can feel her soft fur, but she quickly sneaks away, and I feel like she is mocking me. If we're going to be playing tag, it's obvious who has the genetic advantage here. She's so much faster and has such quick reflexes. I call out to my mum to help me, asking her what the time is. In just over an hour, twenty-five women will be coming to my house for a yoga session on my patio. I really could have timed this adventure so much better. My heart beats. I don't want to let the cats out of my sight.*

*I dive deeper into the impenetrable thicket. It feels like a life-and-death struggle. Mia is flailing around with wildness in her eyes, as though she's finally discovered her purpose in life: playing hide-and-seek in the thorniest shrub she can find. I lunge at her, but she's way ahead of me, again. Here comes another car... I soon cut her off, and manage to catch her, but I scratch my leg against a sharp branch in doing so, and blood begins to trickle from the wound. Magnum stares at me in surprise, a few metres away. He's far more docile.*

*Once we're back inside, I toss the expensive collars into a drawer. I never want to see them again. We'll have to post a classified ad to sell them. I promise the cats that I'll let them outside again, only on leashes next time. The cats land on the rug, licking away the leaves that have been caught in their long black fur. They give me satisfied looks. This was probably their best afternoon in ages.*

# **CHAPTER 8**

## **THERAPY CAT**

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*A happy arrangement: many people prefer cats to other people, and many cats prefer people to other cats.*

Mason Cooley

Many have testified to the healing and calming powers of cats, and to the support they can offer in times of sickness. Perhaps this is because we humans tend to realise the importance of closeness to others in our moments of fragility?

We're programmed to live with and take care of animals, according to psychiatrist James A. Knight. Today, living in harmony with nature and with animals is less common, but has become more important than ever. We've managed to lose our way somehow, and we need to get back on track.

Cats don't just alleviate our everyday anxieties; they have also been demonstrated to give great support to people suffering from depression or dementia and to children who have learning disabilities or other special needs. Unlike dogs, who also do excellent work in healthcare, cats are low maintenance. A cat largely takes care of itself, as long as it is fed, given water, and given somewhere to do its business. Because of this, a cat is free to be present in the patient's life in a wholly different manner, without any special requirements.

A friend of Ulrica's has a cat named Bosse. When he was found, he had been left in a plastic bag in a bin behind Globen in Stockholm. He was badly malnourished and weak. He hissed and scratched at anybody who approached him. After some time, love, and care, Bosse began to trust humans, and now, he's a very harmonious cat.

There are plenty of stories about cats and their uncanny knack for finding their way home or turning negatives into positives and making a new start in life, as long as their needs are fulfilled. Most humans should be able to identify with that. Even those of us who never literally starve will end up taking some blows in life, at some point or other. We have to deal with illness, loss, betrayal, and other challenges that can feel insurmountable in

the moment. Take good care of your unique soul, address your essential needs, and keep putting one foot in front of the other when things get rough. Easy does it. You can land on your feet, too, just like your cat.

## CATS WHO CARE AND CATS WHO WATCH

Your cat can be a huge source of support when you get home, stressed and worn out after a hard day's work. Or when you fall ill. Even its mere presence can be calming. Then, there are some cats who seem to have found a higher calling in life, a mission to help and support those who are truly in need.

The use of therapy cats is a proven and effective treatment in care homes that cater to patients with problems like schizophrenia and dementia. Perhaps you're familiar with the book *Making Rounds with Oscar*? The story first got legs after a highly publicised article by doctor and geriatrician David Dosa was published in the New England Journal of Medicine. Many an eyebrow was raised when Dosa gave an account of the mottled rescue cat who would watch over the dying patients. Time and time again, the cat accurately sensed when a patient only had a few hours left to live. It would wander around outside the room and then make a determined leap onto the patient's bed and curl up close to the sick person resting there.

Healthier patients, too, said that they liked having the cats around.

'We now know from numerous studies that animal companion programs can be incredibly beneficial to nursing home patients – with and without dementia. They help to reduce depression and decrease agitation rates,' David Dosa has stated in an interview.

The dementia care home Steere House in Providence, where David Dosa has spent most of his career, made a decision early on to integrate animals into their environment. Birds squawk in cages in the recreation spaces, and when he wrote his book in 2010, there were a total of six cats living on the three floors of the home. It all began when a wildcat happened to be sneaking around the place when it was first built and subsequently refused to move out. Henry became the first cat at Steere House, and when he died, the staff missed him so badly that they decided to adopt six new cats to fill the void. One of these cats was Oscar. Now, Oscar wasn't exactly a charming sort – he was a bit of a grump, to be honest. But soon, David

Dosa couldn't fail to notice what was happening at the home. Whenever a patient was dying, the black-and-white cat, who was so shy in other circumstances, would be there, outside the door, scratching at it and demanding to be let in. He would often jump onto the foot end of the bed and stay there, purring and lying still, until the patient drew his or her last breath. After this, he would withdraw again, often to his favourite spot in nurse Mary's room.

*Looking at Oscar curled up beside Mrs. Davis, I was reminded of the cats they buried with the ancient Egyptians. This scene was certainly peaceful enough. 'The thing is,' Mary said slowly, 'Oscar only spends time with patients who are about to die.'*

Excerpt from Making Rounds with Oscar

'There have been times when he was the first to know that a patient was close to dying. Oscar has been present for more than one hundred deaths,' Dr Dosa reported in an interview.

For a moment, the team even speculated that maybe the cat was somehow causing the deaths, but this suspicion was fortunately dispelled. All the patients at the care home were very ill, and very old. They had anything from days to weeks or months left. Oscar would walk into a dying patient's room when they were down to the last few hours. Dosa and other experts have tried to determine what it is that allows cats to predict death like this. One theory is that there is a scent that attracts the cat, and another is that cats simply have some kind of sixth sense for these things.

Research has shown the devastating impact that age, loneliness, and isolation can have. The therapeutic effects that spending time with a dog or cat can have are also well documented.

Carina recalls her grandmother, who suffered a severe case of senile dementia.

*Grandma Britti maintained a busy social life and an active schedule for the longest time. She would probably have referred to herself as 'still sharp'. She went square dancing, bounded around like a child, and was one of the happiest, warmest, and most inquisitive people I had ever met. But at the age of ninety, she began to disappear from us, gradually. First, there were subtle warnings. One day, she burned the*

*food on her cooker, and the next day, she claimed somebody had stolen her jewellery.*

*Her husband, Grandpa Ragnar, got very angry with her as she kept forgetting everything he'd just been telling her. She deteriorated bit by bit, until she was no longer able to maintain her hygiene. She would turn up in stained clothing, forgetting our names. A residential care home was the only solution. The staff had a plush animal that soon became popular among the patients. This soft little toy dog made the rounds, from embrace to embrace – it wasn't the best in terms of clinical hygiene, perhaps, but it made the patients happy. Eventually, Grandpa had to move into the secure unit, too, which brought about a quick improvement in grandma's condition.*

*But then, Grandpa died. He fell on the way to the bathroom late one night, and his body never recovered. He lived to be one hundred years old. Grandma's loneliness was soon plain to see. Her protests took a variety of forms, including refusing to go into the shower, or hissing at the other patients in the ward. In hindsight, I've found myself wondering: what if there had been a therapy cat in my grandma's unit? Or, at least, a digital robot kitten?*

Dementia is a growing problem in the West. More than 50 million people are estimated to be suffering from it, according to the WHO survey of 2019, and on any given day around 10,000 new cases are discovered. Cats have proven to be able to play a particularly important role in relation to dementia patients, specifically. Also, electronic options are available for patients who can't take care of a living cat. The Camanio Care company has collaborated with Ageless Innovation's Joy for All Companion Pets and developed electronic therapy cats that are specifically designed to bring joy and a sense of safety to elderly dementia patients. For about 300 USD, you can order a lifelike artificial cat.

The cat has a vibrating purring feature which can be felt by placing your hand on it. The fur is very similar to the real thing and integrated sensors detect touch and motion.

These therapy pets (the company also manufactures artificial dogs) have been featured in a number of studies and have been demonstrated to counteract anxiety, agitation, loneliness, and social isolation. They also improve patients' quality of life and provide positive interactions both for

the residents and for their visiting families. In many countries, residential care is so prohibitively expensive that elderly dementia patients often end up staying at home or with relatives for as long as possible. A cat can offer useful support and companionship in that situation. Placing a hand against the soft fur, the healing vibrations, experiencing a mewing little creature who acknowledges your existence with a slow, loving blink of the eyes.

Loneliness is increasing. Researchers have observed a twenty-nine per cent increase in mortality among the socially isolated, and loneliness is also known to increase one's risk of suffering a series of physical and psychological issues: high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, obesity, immune system disorders, anxiety, depression and Alzheimer's disease. What if a cute little kitty could make a difference here? Research carried out by Ageless Innovation makes reference to more than ten studies which have shown that interactions with pets – whether they be electronic or organic – can reduce anxiety and agitation and improve well-being and quality of life overall for elderly care recipients. Their memory improved and their need for medication decreased. Patients have transitioned from a state of constant, dark rage to one of laughter and interactions with an affectionate little cat. Dementia patients seem to have been reminded of past pets in their lives and have wanted to sleep next to the cats.

Therapy dogs are still more common than therapy cats, but the accessibility and adaptability of cats constitute significant advantages. The USA has organisations like Pet Partners, which assess cats and certify them as therapy animals. Among other things, they test the cat's responses to sudden noises, and make sure it won't behave aggressively.

In order for a cat to finish the programme it has to be at least a year old and have lived with the patient for at least six months.

We read an article about Raul the therapy cat on the website [thecatniptimes.com](http://thecatniptimes.com). Raul works in a school where he supports children who have learning difficulties and other special needs. Raul, who has his own Instagram page @raultherapycat, has also spent time at a geriatric care home. An old man called Herold used to have two cats in his home, and so he was delighted when Raul turned up. Herold's relatives noted that he had started to laugh again.

We have therapy cats in Sweden, too, although we don't have the same kind of institutions promoting their use, and the practice here depends rather on the efforts of volunteers and local politicians. This was pointed

out by an inquiry led by Susanne Gaje, who published the report *Katt på äldreboende* (Cats in Care Homes) (2019).

She spent two years carrying out an extensive interview-based study of residential homes which kept cats to find out more about the interactions between cats and frail humans. The results were clear: according to the report, the use of cats as companions in geriatric care homes can contribute to calm and well-being among residents, as well as soothing the loneliness and ennui that some of them unfortunately contend with.

*A man who turned ninety had kept cats throughout his life. When he moved into the care home, one of the staff brought one of their own kittens in to see him. The man was delighted to get to spend time with a cat again.*

Excerpt from *Katt på äldreboende*

We meet up with Susanne and her cream-pointed Ragdoll, Noomi, in Ekerö, just outside of Stockholm, on a sunny day in spring. A newly made rhubarb crumble is giving off a wonderful scent in the kitchen. Her resource materials are all laid out on the kitchen table. She fills our coffee cups and begins to tell us how it all began when she contracted a severe case of double pneumonia.

‘Noomi came in to lie down with me in bed, and I soon noticed what a comfort she was for me during my sickness. My husband has Parkinson’s, so his company isn’t quite the same anymore. Noomi’s presence became extremely important to me while I was ill.’

Her brain kicked into gear. Having worked for the government as an economist and being an experienced author of reports on various topics, piecing this kind of puzzle together was a familiar activity for her. As her pneumonia subsided, she began to study up on the subject of therapy cats.

Studies had been made on the beneficial effects of dogs, but she couldn’t find much literature that addressed the empathic abilities of cats. However, she had read the famous book about Oscar, the therapy cat, and she was growing increasingly curious to find out what the situation was with the use of therapy cats in Swedish healthcare.

The sun coming through the kitchen window is so bright that Susanne asks us if we want her to draw the blind.

‘Can you guess who they are? On the blind, there is a print of a photo of two young people at a low table, eating rice and a bunch of small dishes.

‘That’s me and my husband, Lennart. We weren’t even twenty-five when that was taken; we had only just met at university, and we were on our first long trip abroad – in Japan. Almost nobody we knew had ever been there.’

In the last few years, Lennart’s disease has become so severe that he needs healthcare staff to assist him every three hours. On this day, he’s stayed behind in their flat in the city. Noomi the cat has become an increasingly important companion for Susanne but doesn’t appear to care so much about Lennart. Perhaps this comes down to his lack of enthusiasm when he greets her. They never really got to know each other before he was struck by the illness.

‘The person I interviewed at the care home felt that cats made a big difference. For example, the residents would often ask if the pet had been fed or discuss whether it was appropriate for it to be allowed onto the dining table. One patient, who hadn’t said a single word in a long time, suddenly began to speak. “Oh look, it’s a cat!” The presence of the cat had a calming effect on the staff, too.’

Only one of the interviewed homes expressed a negative opinion, and this seemed to be because the particular cat they tried out was very timid and shy. It wasn’t a good fit for the unit, which dealt with patients with severe dementia who required intensive treatment. In the end, a member of the staff took the cat in.

Some of the people Susanne interviewed for her report also told of how cats – like Oscar – seemed to know that a resident was badly ill and close to death, even before the staff did.

In 2020, Susanne decided that she would revisit the care homes she had interviewed, to see what the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic had been on them.

‘Twenty-two of the twenty-nice homes I included in my study still kept cats, although some had died.’

The staff explained that the cats had become much more important during the pandemic, as they were the only beings that their patients had been allowed to hug. In one care home, she was told of how the residents would often sit in their rooms, watching TV all day – one of them hadn’t even been told that her neighbour in the next room had died. Visits were cancelled almost all year long and loneliness hit the residents with full

force. However, they were still able to hug the cats who were wandering around from room to room. 'The cat became their lifeline to a hug,' Susanne explains.

She has also taken political action in relation to the issue of therapy cats, and she tells of the resistance she's faced.

'I sent a proposal to the borough of Södermalm in Stockholm, in which I explained that the cost of a cat was about 20,000 SEK per year, including food and insurance. This is far cheaper than a trained therapy dog, and the dogs can only work twenty hours a week, and require certified handlers. In many homes, a resident cat was a far more preferable option compared to a dog, which would only be able to visit once or twice a week. It seemed to me that there was a lot of political potential there.'

Susanne was told that they already had a therapy dog and were considering getting a therapy horse.

'A therapy horse? In the city?'

She shakes her head, before going on:

'Therapy dogs are certainly better in hospitals; I'll grant them that. But in geriatric care homes, many prefer to use cats, particularly because many of the patients used to have cats.'

Her proposal to recruit more therapy cats for geriatric care homes was passed on to the chief inspector of geriatric medical services in Södermalm. Then, the pandemic happened, and everything was put on ice.

## CAT CAFE WITH HEALTH BENEFITS

In South Korea, Japan, England, and the USA, cat cafes have become a fairly common sight. These establishments, apart from serving coffee, offer a space for interactions with cats in a friendly, organised setting. In South Korea, doctors prescribe cat cafe visits to depressed patients. This option is available to us in Sweden, too.

The cat cafe Java Whiskers is located on one of the busiest corners in all of Stockholm. We have booked tickets and have made an appointment for between 3 and 4 pm on a Thursday afternoon in May. Site manager Michelle greets us and makes us a perfect cappuccino with oat milk before we settle down for a chat. A few months ago, she was in London helping

with the launch of the Java Whiskers branch there – this is the first step of a planned international launch of the brand.

The idea was born in 2018. The three founders had previously successfully established a chain of ten trampoline parks in various parts of Sweden and they felt ready to take on a new challenge. When a friend told them about a cat cafe in England they realised that this market was completely untapped here at home. The concept is every bit as simple as it is ingenious: a full-on experience, which benefits both the cats and the visitors. The idea for a distinctive brand soon began to take form.

‘It was important to us to highlight all the various health-related benefits that humans can secure from interacting with animals like this. The whole idea has been to create an oasis. Our goal has been to help people, while also helping cats find new homes,’ Michelle tells us.

In Japan, there are cat cafes with thirty cats and sixty guests in a single space. Java Whiskers, for their part, are going for a quieter, more relaxed vibe. There are never more than nine cats in the cafe, and the number of guests is limited so as to provide the best possible experience.

All the cats who live in the cafe are also up for adoption. Yep, that adorable rescue cat who’s peering at us through the glass could be mine, if I wanted. Michelle points to a grey, slightly skinny but adorably cute cat, Teddy, who was found in a garbage room in Stockholm when he was just a few months old.

‘At first, when he’d just gotten here, we couldn’t feed him or get close; he would just hiss at us. He hid from everything and everyone. After twelve weeks, he let us pet him. It’s amazing to witness the progress that shy strays make once they get here. They might not have any trust at all, of humans or other cats, because of how they have been treated, but after spending some time here, they begin to feel safe. I cried the first time Teddy let us pet him; I hadn’t imagined that the day would ever come. It moved us all so greatly. And he’s not the only cat who has responded this way to this place.’

Michelle tells us about four young kittens who recently underwent the same process. She can clearly see that shy cats, who aren’t particularly used to people, still seem to take some comfort from being around other cats. They help each other understand that not all humans are dangerous.

‘That’s the best part of this job: the boost you get from helping an animal regain its trust in humanity. I learn so much about setting boundaries from them.’

The hope she's expressing here isn't lost on us: 'If cats can start over, people can too,' we think to ourselves as we listen to Michelle's account.

'We've been in contact with many of the cats who have been with us in the past, and we get such great pictures of them being pampered and petted in their new homes. And the people who visit us walk out the door with a smile on their faces. Less stressed and calmer, they tell us, "This was just what I needed right now!" Many of them describe it as entering a different world, far removed from the stress of city life.'

Several of the cats have made a big impression on Michelle and her colleagues. A few days earlier, Elvis moved to his new family. He had been captured along with about ten other cats in a colony somewhere in Skåne. All of them were very shy. Once he had made himself comfortable at the cat cafe, he soon befriended another cat, Lisa ('they fell in love!'), and they ended up moving in with the same family together. 'It was quite an emotional moment when they moved out. I had been around from the very first and named him. But at the same time, I knew he was going to live with a great family.'

There are about 100,000 stray cats in Sweden, and so far, hundreds of them have found new homes through Java Whiskers since they opened just over a year ago.

They collaborate with the non-profit Djurens Chans (Animal Rescue), which selects the cats that end up going to the cafe. The first step for a visitor who falls in love with one of the cats is to register interest, and then, a long series of applications kicks in. You can't expect to bring a cat home that same day.

After being given a comprehensive run-down of the regulations, we're ushered in through a hallway where we wash our hands and take off our shoes before entering the world of cats that awaits inside: the lounge. Here, all play happens on the cats' terms: nobody is allowed to disturb or feed them, and we're immediately taken by how calm, respectful, and meditative the atmosphere is.

At one of the tables we see a young couple, each with a sleeping cat in their lap. They gaze at each other blissfully and tell us they used to have cats but can't have one now because their home isn't big enough.

After a while, we find a solitary, elderly woman sitting in a corner. She peers out over the cats in the room, seemingly reflecting on life. A little

later she walks up to pet one of them, who is stretched out on the windowsill with his belly in the air, signalling a sense of absolute security.

Some of the other cats are climbing around up there on the specially designed shelves, the highest of which runs round the entire room, and we nod to one another. Utilising height is one of the expert tips we've received from our cat researcher friend Elin, after all. Time seems to stand still in here; everybody speaks gently and moves with caution. Everything is soft and gentle. No slamming of cups on saucers. Children under ten aren't allowed inside, to ensure that the atmosphere will remain quiet and peaceful. All we can hear is some soothing music, which sounds more like the kind of thing we'd expect to hear in a spa than a cafe.

We discover toys of various kinds, from a selection of popular cat fishing rods to a plain cardboard box in the middle of the room, which the cats seem to love. And then, there's Teddy, who lived in a garbage room until just a few months ago. He eyes us cautiously.

The cats are left alone for ten hours each night, from closing time in the evening until opening time in the morning.

'Many days we'll come in early just to get some extra snuggles in. There's nothing I love more than cats. The well-being they spread, to us as well as to the customers, is such an obvious gift, and is actually one of the foundations our business rests on. When you've experienced some kind of difficulties at home it can be very soothing to come here. The cats are a great source of comfort,' Michelle explains.

Among the visitors, we spot families and obvious cat lovers, who have had cats all their lives, but also couples who are looking for an unusual, peaceful, and cosy date.

'We were fully booked for Valentine's Day,' she tells us with a smile.

Java Whiskers opened on Surbrunnsgatan in Stockholm in 2019, and the location on Great Portland Street in London opened in 2020. Unfortunately, they had to close down in London almost immediately, because of the pandemic.

But now, in May 2021, when we meet, they're about to open their doors over there again. One of the owners, Tobias Larsson, joins us at the table.

'We've attracted far more interest than we expected, both from customers and from the media. When we started up in Stockholm, we were featured in every magazine and every TV channel.'

They like running businesses that convey positive, deep messages. Their trampoline parks were all about getting kids to move about more.

‘We feel like we’re doing something good for the cats, as well as contributing to the well-being of our guests. We have visitors who work in construction, who have no past experience of cats at all, but who find themselves not wanting to leave because of how much they love the atmosphere here.

They designed the environment in collaboration with an interior design firm, and they’ve made sure to include as many smart climbing surfaces for the cats as possible without losing the sense that you’re having a coffee in a cosy living room in someone’s home. Minimalist paintings adorn the walls. The subjects are all famous cat lovers, from performer John Lennon to fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent, adding a dash of the international world of cats to the space.

Tobias has a cat called Daphne back home in Skövde, where he lives with his kids half the time. The other half of his time is spent in London, with his girlfriend.

In London, Java Whiskers is collaborating with the Scratching Post Cat Rescue, which, much like Djurens Chans, helps cats in need find new homes.

‘We get lots of requests, so we can be selective and choose very good homes. It’s all about matching the needs of the cats up with what a home offers – some of them need to be able to go outside, for example.’

Tobias has particularly strong memories of one visitor, a woman.

‘She came because her doctor had prescribed cat cafe visits to her. She struggled a lot with anxiety, and she had tried out all kinds of treatments. This was the most helpful thing she had tried, she told me.’

## CATS SAVED MY LIFE

At thirty-seven, Josephine Norman, is the number one cat influencer in Sweden, and has more than 300,000 Instagram followers. In a house in the country, outside Örebro, she lives with her seven beloved family members, which are all Ragdolls.

Josephine claims that cats ended up being her salvation. After having struggled with mental health issues growing up and then suffering abuse at

the hands of her boyfriend for several years, her trust in other people had completely evaporated.

‘I can’t live with humans,’ she explains to us, when we meet for one of several interviews for this book. ‘One of my favourite things about cats is that nothing about their behaviour is affected. They don’t perform tricks for attention; they do it because they enjoy it. You can trust in every second of a cat’s existence. They’re not like people; they don’t deceive and play games. They’re also not like dogs; they don’t do everything you tell them to. Cats mind their own business and take what they want. We could all learn a lot from cats in that regard. If I can, I’d love to get to tell others how cats can alleviate anxiety.’

Since 2012, Josephine blogs about her life with her cats for the Swedish insurance company Agria. In 2013, she started her Instagram account @fjarilflickans.

The cats have guided her both in her personal and in her professional life. Alongside her breeding operation, Josephine runs an online shop where she sells her own brand of organic cat toys. On top of all this, she is a qualified cat behaviourist, after taking online classes through Oxford University.

Josephine mainly took up blogging for her own sake, and she wasn’t prepared for what it would be like to have lots of followers asking her about all kinds of stuff, from why their cats refused to eat, to questions about toilet habits and claw trimming. As she became increasingly forthcoming about her own problems, both her panic attacks and the everyday challenges that come with having so many cats, her blog and her Instagram account attracted more and more followers. ‘When I chose to share the details of my panic attacks, I received a great deal of support. A huge number of people had experienced the same thing. I’m in close contact with my followers, and I know for a fact that there are several besides myself who would never have made it through the difficult times if they didn’t have a cat.’

While we’re talking, Muffin hops onto her knee. His furry tail brushes against the video screen. Her closest family today consists of Muffin and the other Ragdolls, as well as a litter of annual kittens, and thanks to them she is able to lead a functional life. Some days, her panic attacks are too much to bear, but most of the time, she’s OK.

‘When I was incredibly down, a few months ago, the kittens were four weeks old, and I kept them on the couch while I was in a Skype meeting with my therapist. She reacted to the change in my behaviour when the

kittens were nearby. I took one up and hugged it and she asked me: “What is it about cats that makes you so happy?” I answered that I like that I can rely on them one hundred per cent, and that they will never lie to me. “Well, what about people, then?” she asked me. My face changed completely! She could tell right away that the security I experienced when we spoke about cats just spilled out of me, to be replaced by the huge insecurities I feel around people.’

Josephine’s encounter with Muffin proved to be the turning point. He arrived one day in June 2012, the first of a series of Ragdoll cats she purchased from a breeder in Spain. Because of her anxiety, she didn’t dare go pick him up herself, so she posted an ad. *Who would like a paid holiday in the sun, and the job of bringing a kitten back on the way home?*

‘When Muffin came into my life, I had just been dumped by my boyfriend of five years, so my Spanish cat dude ended up being an absolute saviour. A real-life good luck cat! Muffin helped me process my loss. My Instagram account has actually been helpful to me, too, in many ways. I’ve never really experienced what it’s like to have a good family, but I feel I can be open about how I and my cats actually feel with my followers.

‘Muffin had to absorb all my sorrows, but the wonderful thing was that he didn’t mind. He didn’t back away from me; he made me feel safe instead. I remember how he let me plant my nose against his snout and hold it there. It felt like the warmest, most secure hug I had ever received.’

When the largest animal insurance vendor in Sweden advertised an opening for a blogger that same year, she sent an application and got the job.

‘I started out blogging for my own sake, because I wanted to document Muffin as he grew up. I didn’t expect to get so many followers.’

The same year she got Muffin, she made up her mind.

‘I couldn’t deal with living with humans anymore. It was all so obvious. But I felt that I could trust my cats. They never lie. They don’t deceive, like humans do. I had a boyfriend when I was younger who abused me for several years. He would do things like spit in my face...’

They met when Josephine was seventeen years old, and they were soon engaged. She describes their love as the kind of thing you see in the big Hollywood blockbusters. A love so powerful it defies explanation. They soon acquired a cat, Lucifer, who she refers to as her ‘all-black miracle cat’. Then, they bought another one, Thea, a beautiful tortoiseshell female. The

prefix of her pedigree name was Fjärilsflickan (“Butterfly girl”), which would later become the name of Josephine’s Instagram account.

Thea was run over chasing butterflies.

‘She was my butterfly girl. Every time I see a butterfly since then, I have a quick talk with Thea.’

As her relationship with her cats grew stronger, her relationship with her boyfriend deteriorated. ‘When we had been together for two years, he started physically abusing me on a daily basis. At the time, I didn’t know the first thing about panic attacks or agoraphobia. But I was unable to go outside. I was incapable of drawing the connection between my reaction and what was happening.’

They bought another cat, Tova, before things calmed down enough for Josephine to muster the strength to get out of this destructive relationship. Quite soon, she met a new boyfriend, who lived in Stockholm.

One day, she learned that her very first cat, Zorro, who still lived with her mother, had died. Her mother had him put to sleep because he was disturbing the neighbours at night.

‘She got rid of him, without asking me. Zorro was perfectly healthy; he wasn’t even ten years old. I can never forgive her for that. I was so angry! How could my own mother do that to me?’

Betrayal and hurt at the hands of adults are recurring features of Josephine’s life. She has spent several years in psychotherapy, attempting to piece herself and her own history together. She has no memories at all from her childhood before the age of nine. It’s been established that she suffered a series of dreadful, traumatic events, which she has since repressed completely.

‘Mum fed me, and gave me whole clothes to wear, but she never gave me a hug, a word of encouragement, or any understanding. I was always different, and I’ve always been told: “We would have liked you more if you’d been a boy... Why can’t you be more like your brothers?”’

Her brothers, who were eight and ten years older than her, used to lock her inside the freezer. Her dad was an alcoholic who was violent to her mother.

‘Mum would drink with him once a week. I could always tell when she was drunk, because she would ask me to take care of her, and help her get home.’

Josephine doesn't trust anybody but her cats these days. Her blog also includes accounts of her life as a breeder. She worked as a cat photographer for a while – taking pictures of cats is something she's always been passionate about, and the pics on her Instagram page offer ample evidence of this passion.

Her cat interest has taken a variety of expressions over the years. A few years ago, she took a class in behavioural science, which focused on cats.

'I've always enjoyed genetics. I wanted to learn more about what goes on in the interactions between cats and humans. Correlations, causes, and effects. I found a one-year online course at Oxford University in England, and that's how I began my studies.'

One class soon led to several others. Before she knew it, Josephine was surrounded by an entire world of cats and had lots of cat knowledge to share with in her blog.

'I usually say that it all comes down to taking a genuine interest in your cat. If the cat has a problem, it's a good idea to keep a journal. You'll soon discover your cat's personality.'

Josephine continues to tell us the story of her life, in which Lucifer, the miracle cat, has played a highly significant role.

One week after the breakup, her ex phoned her and asked, 'You're not missing a cat, are you?'

Josephine hesitated.

'Come to my place tomorrow, so we can talk, and then I'll let you have Lucifer back...'

She still finds it difficult to talk about how her beautiful black cat was kidnapped, and the violent resolution that followed. Her voice almost breaks as she continues.

'I went to his house in the morning, and I sat down at his kitchen table with a cup of coffee. I don't remember what we were saying, but... all of a sudden, he hit me – Bam! – and I fell to the floor. After that, he kept me locked up all morning and afternoon and just kept at it. He beat me constantly. He threw me into the kitchen fan, and I almost passed out, but somehow, I managed to stay conscious. He pulled my hair until my scalp bled. He took my phone and read the messages I had written to my new boyfriend. Then, he sat down on the couch, and spoke very calmly: "We need to decide what you're going to say when you get home..."' They left together and went to her home. She pretended to have forgotten her keys,

and rang the doorbell, and when her partner opened it, she mouthed the word 'Help.'

The ex-boyfriend ordered Josephine's new boyfriend to pack his things and go back to Stockholm, where he belonged. Then, he took out a knife and held it to her throat. Her partner went upstairs and began packing silently.

'Somehow, he managed to call the police, who drove up to the house and arrested my ex. I told them there were several complaints against him, going back years, and they promised to take that into consideration.'

The police also promised to get in touch with Josephine when her ex was going to be let go, but she never heard back from them. A few days later, he was in the bushes waiting for her, and he charged at her. Josephine had to leave her hometown and move to Stockholm, and since then, she doesn't trust the police, or men, or people in general.

In November 2021, Lucifer went to his final sleep. 'My ex only told me about it a month later. I didn't get to be there. I would have wanted to hold his paw. How can he just be gone? He's the cat who stood by me through all the tough times. He was even kidnapped. A day or so later, I found a coffee cup with a black cat with yellow eyes on it, who looked just like Lucifer. So, now I take my coffee in it every morning, to feel close to him.'

Her journey back to life has been a difficult one, but her cats have helped her every step of the way, and she's begun to notice the small moments of happiness that occur in everyday life. Her panic attacks are still regular. It's worst in the summer, when she has hardly any energy at all. 'The cats become my reason to get out of bed in the morning. I'd like to tell the world what cats mean to people like myself, who suffer from mental illnesses. Cats help and soothe us. Feeling genuinely loved by a cat is the best feeling there is.'

She remains uncertain about her future.

'It's possible I might let another boyfriend into my life at some point. But he would have to be prepared to accept that my cats will always come first.'

## Therapeutic Value

Interactions with animals can be particularly valuable for people who have suffered betrayal or lost their trust in others, and are thus unable to form

long-term, secure relationships. Pets aren't perceived as threats the way a human might be. By sharing their interest in animals with others, they can form trusting relationships around the animals that take part in their therapy.

Children from violent homes are more likely to behave violently than others, but they are also more likely to struggle emotionally as adults. Adding dog training to the school curriculum has resulted in stronger social skills and less aggression among students.

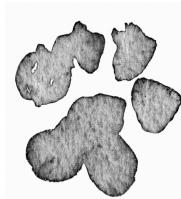
Researcher Dennis C. Turner has observed that cats can lend support to the clinically depressed, too. However, it all has to begin with a willing and receptive patient.

'When an individual is ready to accept help, the cat can play a decisive role in their recovery. Cats are also very adaptable pets, who can adjust their degree of social interaction to the needs of the human. If a person settles for feeding the cat and the occasional snuggle, the cat will accept that, even if it would prefer to play and snuggle more. And if the cat owner wants more interactions, that's OK, too. Each cat can adapt to many different types of personality, and this explains part of the therapeutic value that a cat can deliver. A cat won't intrude. It will simply be there,' Dennis explains. An interesting survey from a few years ago revealed that a majority of privately practicing and state-employed psychotherapists in the USA keep a cat at work, either in an adjacent yard or in the building. The cats offer opportunities for interaction, and quite often participate in sessions with patients.

It's evident, then, that cats can feed us mental strength by virtue of their healing presence.

# ULRICA

## A Second Chance



*The phone rang. It was a little after four o'clock in the afternoon.*

*It was the surgeon, calling to inform us that the transplant had been a success, and that we were welcome to come and visit Magnus later that evening.*

*My heart was pounding, and the children and I stood there for a long time, just hugging each other. I felt nothing at all and everything conceivable all at once. It felt like we were on the way back to normal.*

*Even though Magnus's recovery was quick, and he was back home after just a few days, we still had a long struggle ahead. I took care of everything in the household: the kids, our pets, our home. I tried to work occasionally and limited myself to only essential tasks.*

*In September, Magnus went through his first transplant rejection, and he had to go back to the hospital and have a hard reset performed on his immune system with a massive dose of cortisone. The idea was to give his body no choice but to accept the new organ. The treatment succeeded, and he was back home with us just ten days later. During this whole time, Hamilton and Bore started to sleep together on Magnus's side of the bed. Each night, they settled down there, as if to keep Magnus's spot warm. It felt like they were telling me to have hope. That he would be back. The same thing happened again in November. And the same thing repeated itself with the pets.*

*We went through the whole procedure yet again in December. By this point, we'd had enough, and Magnus voiced what I had been feeling too: that we were running out of fight.*

*The doctors told us it wasn't a rejection this time, but a blood clot. Our household rhythm changed, and now, every time we fed the pets, morning and evening, we also gave Magnus an injection to the belly. Their food routines helped us remember his shots. The needles were tiny, and the cartridges were white, orange, and black. The logo on the needle container looked a lot like the logo of the Harley Davidson motorcycle brand, and we took this as a sign that Magnus would have to get back into motorcycling if he got through this. He would buy a Road King motorcycle from Harley Davidson.*

*So, every day, when he pulled his trousers down to inject the blood thinner, he repeated the mantra 'Harley Davidson, Harley Davidson.'*

*Hundreds of shots, and eight months later, Magnus was feeling better than he had in a long time. Bore and Hamilton finally switched to my side of the bed. And Magnus bought a motorcycle with his savings.*

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# CARINA

## Cats Help Fill the Void



*On 16 June 2021, Anders passed away at Ersta Hospice in Stockholm, after months of terrible complications, pains that no morphine in the world could dull, and three years of fighting the cancer that eventually spread beyond the point of no return.*

*It was the sunniest, and the saddest, of days, a little more than a year after we decided to get a cat. I've given a lot of thought to his sudden change of attitude when it came to pets. He said no to getting a cat for twenty-five years, and then, suddenly, it became all-important to him that we have one. Maybe Anders somehow sensed that he didn't have long left when he decided to research the Siberian breed of allergy-friendly cats.*

*Anders was so wise; he was like a really wise cat, with nine lives. He always put the family above everything, in every situation. Perhaps he subconsciously sensed that it would do us good to grow the family a little, so that the void he would leave would seem a little less horrendous, a little softer, more comfortable to dwell in, with a cat or two to keep us company.*

*Now, the cats help us to continue our healing as we mourn. Mia and Magnum sleep on Anders' side of the bed. I go to bed at 11 pm every night, or earlier, if I can. We've landed in a new set of routines since my husband passed. The cats have, gradually, finally, been allowed into the bedroom. I need their company. They often purr sweetly at the foot end of the bed, on Anders's side.*

*However, the other night, it was pandemonium. They ran around the flat, hunting each other, as if it were a matter of life and death. They skidded through corners, never slowing down. The last thing they wanted was to go to bed. I managed to fall asleep only to be awakened an hour or so later by*

*a cat that literally flew over me, landed on the bedpost, and then jumped back down.*

*'It can't go on like this,' I thought, in desperation. 'I have to sleep!' The full moon was shining in through the gap in the curtains, and I soon realised that this must be the explanation. A month later, you see, the same thing happened again. When the moon is full, they speed up. They get an itch to run around. I shake my head and laugh at their antics; my precious rays of sunshine could get away with practically anything. As long as they let me sleep.*

*They help me find the light in the darkness, and they make me feel needed every morning. Somebody has to get up and feed them and clean their litter box out, to make sure the routines are maintained. If it weren't for the cats, I would probably have spent days on end in bed after Anders died. Once I'm up, their ingenuity never fails to surprise me; they're always up to so much crazy stuff.*

*The children and I take turns sending funny pics to each other of how our cats are bringing us light in all the darkness. We've grown so very close to them, so used to having them around. If we go away for the weekend, we can physically feel our longing for them. I find myself wondering over simple things, like how they can be playing and hunting each other like lunatics half the night, only to land in a sunny window at dawn, peacefully watching a new day awaken around them.*

# CHAPTER 9

## SUN CAT

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*Kittens are angels with whiskers.*

Alexis Flora Hope

One of the most fascinating things about cats is the fact that they always find the sunniest spots in the home and lie down in them – it could be a windowsill or a spot right in the middle of the floor – to lick themselves clean, stretch out, or simply recharge. Just like us humans, cats absorb energy from light and sunshine. They charge up in the sun, like solar panels.

Research has shown that cats love warmth, and that this is one of the reasons why they like to rest in their owners' laps. Some cats even lie down on their owners to sleep. Others might spend the night at the foot end of the bed. Lying on top of us, or close to us, helps them maintain their body temperature – we get to be their personal radiators, basically.

When your cat climbs onto your lap, this means that it trusts you and feels secure enough with you to let its guard down. Your lap happens to be an excellent place to sleep and rest. It's just the right size, and very warm – throw in a soft blanket and you've made yourself the cosiest spot on Earth!

## CATS AS MUSES

Many performers and actors have spoken of how important their pets are to them, and how they help them deal with having to live their lives in the spotlight. Having a cat helps them form a connection to something normal in an extremely superficial world.

Singer Taylor Swift has said that her cats are her most trusted confidants, who are always there for her, and who she can always share a quiet moment with, without having to explain anything. Singer and songwriter John Lennon was a big cat lover, too. It began with him playing with cats on his way home from school as a boy, and later, the aunt he stayed with got a cat, and they named it Elvis. John kept cats for the rest of his life, and they were an incredible source of fascination for him. His ex-wife Cynthia has related

how they both appreciated the way cats never ask anybody's permission to exist or be the specific individuals they are. Every cat they owned was a unique personality, a perfect family member, and made their home a more inviting place. John was inspired by his cats when he wrote music, and he often brought them to the studio with him.

Freddie Mercury, the lead singer of the rock band Queen, loved all of his cats: Deliah, Tom, Jerry, Tiffany, Dorothy, Goliath, Lily, Miko, Oscar, and Romeo. He always phoned home to speak to them when he was away on tour, and they all had their own rooms in his big house. Freddie also wrote songs in their honour and dedicated entire albums to them. When Freddie Mercury passed away, it was revealed that he had left parts of his wealth to his cats, as well as to his ex-girlfriend Mary Austin, with whom he shared his great passion for cats.

## CARRIERS OF LIGHT

As any cat owner will have noticed, cats love reflections, light, and the sun. It's as though they were always ready to fill up on light whenever an opportunity presents itself, to maintain their systems.

They like to lie down on you or on your things because they like heat and because they want to mark their territory. The higher the spot they can reach, the better, because that's where they would have hidden in nature. That's why your laptop or tablet is more appealing to cats than the desk itself. You can observe your cat marking your belongings by rubbing its face or paws against them, to apply its pheromones to substances that influence the behaviours of other cats. Lying in the sun can be a good way for both cats and humans to recover. In the sun, we can replenish our energy and heal efficiently, and cats are masters of the balancing act of life. It's as though they were telling us: 'Here I am, and I intend to take every single chance I have to enjoy a moment in the sun and have fun while I'm doing it.'

The same feeling is triggered when we play with them. They engage in the play whole-heartedly, without ever questioning whether it's the cool or sensible thing to do. They play because it makes them feel good. Perhaps this is in part caused by their predatory nature, but it's also caused by the pleasure they take from interacting with us humans. Communicating

through play is relationship-building. Once they've finished playing, they make it known that they want to rest or sneak back into the darkness, to get some vital recovery.

When we care for a cat, and feed it, pet it, brush it, clean its litter box, and make sure it has its own space inside the home, this will indirectly bring us to lend greater consideration to our own well-being. It gives us practice at making the best of the light and the moment.

Another context in which cats recharge their batteries is in the dark. Going inside wardrobes to hide and sleep is a common trick.

We've both gone through years of concern for our loved ones, while our husbands, Magnus and Anders, were badly ill. As the loved one of a seriously ill person, you have to take responsibility for all the parts of life that don't pause like kids, and work, and all the everyday stuff that just carries on while you need to be there for your sick loved one. The thing people tend to overlook badly in these situations is their own health. It's easy to take it for granted, because you're the one who can and must stand tall in stormy weather. However, this can cost you if you don't watch out.

We're writing parts of this book in the sun, in Palma, Mallorca, and kicking off every day with a power walk by the ocean, to help get us in the right mood, find our agility and find our strength. One day, we picked up the pace, added some interval sprints, and felt the flow of energy intensify in our bodies and minds as we alternated running at top speed with slower jogs. We also found it a lot easier to focus when we sat down to write afterwards. It struck us that this is exactly what cats do. They use their various tempo shifts and intervals to drum up the energy they need to hunt, play, sleep, and explore. In other words, if you don't already have a good routine in place, you could try to emulate cats by making sure to get outside each day, look for sunlight, and activate your body by walking, jogging, or strength training.

This wisdom is also integrated into the practice of yoga, as exemplified by the Sun Salutation. Fifteen hundred years ago, people began to honour the sun each day by bowing down in reverence to its power, in the knowledge that the sun is what makes life possible. The premise was that a moment spent bowing and taking in the morning sun would feed the soul enough inspiration and light to keep an individual's motivation and drive up and running all day long.

# CATS CAN HELP US FIND OUR LIGHT

Yoga instructor Sarah Elfvin, a friend of ours, is a bringer of light who lives in the countryside on Mallorca with her husband, Patric the naprapath, their three children, a rescue dog from Portugal, two donkeys, and three cats: the siblings Orangina and Zelda, and their mother Aisha.

When we meet Sarah on a sunny street in Palma she explains to us that she's always had cats and can't imagine life without them:

‘Our cats are very close to each other, but they also have different territories within the surrounding countryside, which is reminiscent of a savannah – our area is hilly, with peaks and valleys, trees, and sheep. The cats enter and leave the house freely. One moment, they’re catching bats or weasels. The next moment, they’re purring next to us and healing us, reminding us to be present in the moment, and listen to each breath. They lie down in the sun, or in some other spot that has a good energy to it. At night, they’re a bit like owls; they see the light in the darkness. They like being in the dark; there’s nothing intimidating about it. They have an internal radar of sorts and always manage to find their way. ‘Cats bless us with that healing presence. They breathe, purr, and remind me not to get so caught up in work when the computer is running. They lie down on my abdomen when I meditate. They remind me that there is beauty in the wild. It’s this freedom and refusal to compromise that makes cats so beautiful. It makes them instantly, eternally, authentic. They use their sensors, all of their sensory organs, and they encourage us to trust in our guts. They inspire us to insist on never compromising our integrity. Cats also remind us that we need to defend our boundaries. We have to respect them on their own terms. Their freedom feeds us freedom, too.

‘Basically, cats are some dangerously cool animals! They’re always around me, feeding me energy. They teach us to spend time in the sun.’

‘Cats make room for the soul. It’s as though they were able to awaken the most beautiful parts of us.’



*Come, my fine cat, against my loving heart;  
Sheathe your sharp claws, and settle.  
And let my eyes into your pupils dart  
Where agate sparks with metal.*

Charles Baudelaire, from *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Flowers of Evil)

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