

Some May Call Me Crazy – My Dedication to the Welfare of Our Feline Friends
Renee Ceil, Griswold Senior High School

Call me crazy, but I'm the type of person who will sit under a dense cluster of pine trees on Easter Sunday, trying to coerce a starving stray cat to trust me. After two hours or so of shaking a bowl full of food, hoping to propose an offer it couldn't refuse, the cat got up and sat a few feet away. Slowly it crept forward towards the bowl sitting unevenly on the pine needle-covered ground. As it scarfed down the Purina One healthy weight management cat food, I reached out and gently stroked its furry black and white shoulder blades. I realized from the concave abdomen that healthy weight food was not going to do this cat much justice. I picked up the bowl and nonchalantly walked away, hoping the cat would follow. It exceeded my expectations and actually rubbed up against my leg. He must have been dumped by a previous owner, no wild cat would act in such a way, believe me, I know from experience. I stopped, let it eat some more, and then repeated. When we reached my back deck, I coaxed it up the stairs to the glass door, where my mother gave me a look that said, "Oh no, that cat is NOT coming inside." My other two cats were quite flustered at the presence of the cat who frequently teased them as he tore apart the garbage bags at night. I picked him up, opened the door, and brought the cat down to our basement. Did my mother really think that a stern glare was going to stop me? Of course not.

I set up a large cage and put in all the necessary fixings for the cat, who I later named, Mr. Kitty. After posting found signs on the internet and around the town, I brought him to the vet. He was Feline Leukemia/FIV negative, and already neutered. When no one had claimed him, I had a strong feeling he had been abandoned.. I then called a local cat shelter, Kitty Harbor, where I still volunteer to this day. This shelter has seen cats who were abused, hoarded, abandoned, hurt, sick, or simply not wanted anymore. Since 2005, they have cared for over 700 cats, some who have been adopted and some who look like they will spend the rest of their life at the shelter. They have helped lost cats find homes, as well as abandoned cats, such as Mr. Kitty. They put Mr. Kitty up on their website while I fostered him. Although my other cats were not happy about the idea, they were just going to have to learn to accept a temporary room-mate.

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However, I did have to keep him in solitude until his flea infestation was cured. This would only be for a few days, the Frontline took care of those little buggers. With the flea/tick treatment, I also had to use an electric shaver to remove two massive matts on each side of Mr. Kitty's abdomen. This took time, he was not cooperative in this situation.

For about a month, Mr. Kitty called my home his own, until the day he was adopted by a newly married couple. It was hard to let him go, but I still receive pictures of that plump cat enjoying his life. Because he was abandoned, I have realized that more animal shelters are needed for those people who can no longer care for their pets. When an indoor cat is abruptly forced to live on their own outdoors, that does not give them a very high chance at survival. Before Kitty Harbor, there was not a local place where people could bring their unwanted pets or strays they found around their house. Still, this shelter is over-crowded and devastated when it has to turn down a cat due to lack of room.

Call me crazy, but I will trap two wild cats I have never seen before, in the negative temperatures, when I receive a call from a family friend. I will put them in my car, bring them to two different vet offices, only to get turned away because they are feral. Again, I called Kitty Harbor about them. They provided me with a cage to bring to a camp ground where these cats were "living". The people were moving into an apartment and could no longer feed the cats. One looked pregnant, and the other was small, had an eye infection, and was incredibly wild. Once I returned with the cage, the man who was feeding the cats said he would care for them until a vet could be found. When I returned with the cage, he told me he had decided to just let them go.. Incredibly frustrated, I had to set up have-a-heart traps the next day. With the help of another woman from the Kitty Harbor, we caught three cats instead of two over the course of two days. We brought them all in to the shelter. A more caring vet took a look at them, and determined the one who had the eye infection also had Feline Leukemia and was in pain. Sadly, she had to be put down. However the others were vaccinated and fixed. One a male, named Peter, and the

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other a female, named Whoopi. The cat who was believed to be pregnant was actually suffering from a badly developed bladder infection. Some antibiotics cleared that up, and she, along with Peter, are gradually becoming socialized. Soon, they may be adopted into their forever homes.

From this experience, I have learned that just feeding a stray cat is not necessarily the best thing one can do for them. They need to be neutered or spayed and receive proper vaccinations. The cat then becomes dependent on that food, and if that food is no longer supplied to them, they may starve. I have almost failed to mention that Kitty Harbor almost did not accept these cats because of how many cats are already at the shelter. This brings me back to how more shelters are needed in communities to give strays a second chance at living.

Call me crazy, but I will take on four one week-old kittens who lost their mother and become their foster mom. They were found under a bush in a rainstorm. It just so happens they were brought in on my day of volunteering. Without a mother, they would need to be fed every few hours. Therefore, they could not stay at the shelter and so, I volunteered to foster them. Once I got the little brown puff-balls home, my mom helped me bathe them with a warm face cloth. After this, they became white puff-balls. About an hour later, they were now yellow and brown, again. Keeping them clean was quite a task, but feeding them every few hours was even more exhausting. They would wake me up with little meows from their pen, equipped with a heating pad, plenty of blankets, and a large stuffed animal dog for them to snuggle up on. One-by-one, I would feed them, rub their bottoms to urge them to relieve themselves, and then place them back next to their stuffed imitation mother. It was heart-breaking that they could not have a real mother, one who would be able to raise them better than any human. I was fairly content when they finally got to solid food. However, at eight weeks, they were ready to leave. With teary eyes, I kissed their little white heads while putting them in a large cage. I brought them back to Kitty Harbor where they waited to be brought to their forever home.

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My essay is not about animals being tested on, illegal animal fighting, or breeding farms. Instead it is about another cruelty; the importance of cats forced to become strays.. I chose to write about my experience and involvement in saving the animal species that I love. There are too many cats and more shelters are needed in many places to help ease the suffering of unwanted, abandoned, or abused cats. Shelters, like Kitty Harbor, spread the knowledge to the community to spay or neuter cats. This prevents countless births of kittens who become victims to death because of cold temperatures, sickness, predators, or loss of a mother. Shelters provide vaccinations for cats against Rabies, FIV, Feline Leukemia, and other diseases which can reduce the risk to other cats, as well as humans. They are a place for people to bring unwanted cats instead of choosing to toss them like a piece of garbage. Shelters are needed in every community, not just a few. They provide a place for the people who are as crazy about cats as I am to help. With cat shelters and people like myself, the overabundance of cats and cat suffering can be minimized.

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