

Cats

The Zone # 29

April, 2026



The unconditional devotion, love, and caring from a family pet; precious and calming. Many folks connect best with a faithful dog, and yes, we tried that, while others include tropical fish, birds, hamsters, rats, rabbits, and even pet iguanas in their family. For us, Cats fit best. There is something about a fluffy personality that sits on my lap, sometimes soothes with a soft purrrrr, brings lizard gifts, meows for food just because she can, plays with fake mice, and licks feathers on a bouncy string. A few of our cats stood vigil when we were sick, or guarded the lady of the house from footsteps on the wooden steps to our graduate school walk-up apartment. Unconditional, independent, and soothing during Ms. Cat's training and in allowing us onto her premises.

What other pet hides from the vacuum cleaner, coughs up hairballs, walks across you at 1 am in hopes of food, chases a laser light up the wall, shreds your best curtains, pushes trinkets off any shelf, plays with a catnip mouse, delivers leg rubs, or slams unexpected head butts? Perhaps other pets do the same, yet we do not hear of these traits from the owners of worm farms, pet snakes, water buffalo, or an elephant.



Mom and Dad, along with other young families renting single-room quarters in the Quail Apartments in Montpelier, Idaho, brought home kittens for the young post-war kids. Few memories remain of these late 1940's days. Ink Spot occupies my first real memory of a cat in our home. In 1954, a friend of Dad's sent home a long-haired black cat with a single white spot under her chin. In the sun, she shimmered almost golden brown. Dad said, and who could argue with him, she was the color of government ink. She became Inky. Before graduating from high school, Inky II lived with us until we had to move: me to university and Dad to an elevated

government position in Washington, DC. One of the hardest tasks involved me taking Inky to the pound and leaving her in an outside locker. She did nothing wrong; it was we who sentenced her to an uncertain life.

Scotch, the first cat of our married life, came from an Amish farm in Lancaster, Pa. A mixture of yellow, orange, and white, Scottie looked like a serving of scotch and was small enough to fit comfortably in the glass. He would curl up on Sally's slipper as she moved around the kitchen. He grew into a big, handsome dude so protective that, when any approaching visitor reached the top of the stairs, he sat attentively at Sally's side, just glaring at the danger. He looked more like Morris than Moris the Cat did! Later, the summer our daughter was born, Sally and my folks took pre-birth evening walks around the Bethesda neighborhood. Scotty went with them, never straying or venturing far. When we moved to Salt Lake City to begin my new geology career, Scotty remained with a DC family as the care partner for Deloris, a young girl who needed extra care. Scotty remained with her for a decade or more, we later learned.

Our years in Spokane, living on 10 acres of rural land, welcomed a number of cats and a few dogs, too, over the 13 years of residency. Peaches and Stubby, yes, a bobtailed brother traveled home with me from Stanley, Idaho, thanks to a seasoned prospector living on a self-sustaining farm. Peachie bore the only litter of kittens our two girls saw, and proved as instrumental in their maturing as many other life experiences. The cats on Borden Road could come and go, and many never returned, thanks to that old horned Owl nesting at the back of our ponderosa forested property. Spooffy, a farm kitten from a friend, gave our daughter, Rhonda, ringworm. Yet another lesson. Another cat, Gita, turned up along this rural road without a nick on her perfect paws or any evidence of anything but a treasured pet complete with a delicate collar. Postings and newspapers found an announcement that revealed many "owners" were unable to verify anything about her or her color. She became our indoor Siamese cat. An Acrobat capable of swatting away any crumpled package launched towards the waste basket. I traveled a lot, leaving Gita in charge of the cats.

Risa, AKNA, 'The Seven Kilo Cat', adopted us at the Pima County Animal Shelter after my career focused on Mexico. At the time this Tortie started to settle in, we were transferred to Santiago, Chile. She remained with us, learning the maids' Spanish and owning a sun-spotted yard, soft soil under shady bushes, and open windows to roam as she wished. A purring machine, Ris stayed with us until she passed from old age, living her final days in Pine, Arizona. That was a sad day. We vowed not to get a replacement, and given the awkward experiences with Stuff

the Manx, Sally proclaimed, never another male. That changed with Smoke E Fluffy Sox, Skoog Kat, who adopted my daughter's cat full-time in Peoria, AZ. He did come home with us. Cats win over vows and predominates, never forget that. Smokie loved the sunspots, a warm lap, and select furniture he knew looked handsome curled up upon. He turned out to be a care partner and watch cat. I suffer from medical issues, and I often lived alone in Pine. Smokie would sit at the bottom of the bed, watching, sometimes visiting my limp body and reminding me to eat and take care of my hygiene. We put him down in Tucson after he lost most of his body weight, and the Vet felt he had neared the end of his 17-year life. Gone was my unconditional buddy.



We pitched up three times in Tucson over the course of our 60 years of marriage. One cat, CINCA, the neighbor's cat, spent more time with us than tthan next door. We agreed to feed her and did so until she likely left to die on her own. As independent as any feline we have ever met, I watched Cinca kill and eat a rattlesnake in our yard next to the pool. She raised her clawed paw and, while jumping backwards, thumped the snake on the head. After a dozen or so perfect times swats, she just killed and ate a desert dinner.

Today, adopted June, or Junie the Cat, lives among our hearts. Not a lap cat and without much of a purring center, it is as much a special-needs cat as a giver to our needs. Now ten years old, in her third family, we agreed to take her in at age six, to administer her care, work the GI medications, and put up with her idea of playing and biting with active claws. Sounds menacing, but not so. She is a good cat, always near her people and never failing to check up on us. Biting is not aggressive, according to most cat experts; it's just one way to show affection. Scale-tipping at 16 pounds, the Vet says Junie Girl is overweight. Careful there, buddy, never tell a mature lady she is fat. Have a little respect there for a mature girl. We all continue to learn how to deal with her quirks and accept her devotion and care. I guess that is what being a cat person is, accepting unconditional love and caring and returning it from the heart.

Greg McKelvey
gempresphotos@gmail.com
Tucson, Arizona