

Project Cat is nonprofit tax-deductible organization

Feline Community Assistance
Rescue and Adoptions

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Dear Friends of Project Cat,

Winter 2014/Spring 2015

Greetings to everybody in the new year. The years go by fast, don't they? We're sorry we missed reaching out to you last year by not sending a newsletter, but we're grateful to everyone who sent donations and provided support. Sometimes the workload is just too much for us to get everything done, and we always want to put the needs of the animals first. It's difficult to sit in front of the computer when people are pleading with us to take in cats that are starving, sick, mistreated, ignored, or abandoned.

We wish for a lull in the requests, but there never is one. There are times when the emotional toll is so great that we wonder how we can continue; when the heartbreak is so painful that we wonder how we can endure; when the supply of neglected, helpless animals is endless; when our faith in humanity is so shattered that we see no hope for the future and we ask why we even bother. But then we get a note of sincere gratitude for our work, an unexpected contribution, cute, funny pictures of our adopted cats, calls from people looking for a cat to bring into their life, or visits from volunteers who stop by to hang with the cats. We catch a brief moment to admire how some of the hard-luck cases we took in are now flourishing with shiny coats and bright eyes from good nutrition, free of the many parasites and diseases that were dragging them down, feeling healthy and lively and seeking out people for a "scrunch", a warm lap, or some playtime. And then, yes, we find the strength to continue.

When accepting an animal into our shelter, we have many questions to ask ourselves and difficult decisions to make. For each cat we must ask ourselves: Can we provide a better environment than where the animal was before? By nature, the cat tends to be a solitary creature and is a hunter, both predator and prey, and is driven by its natural instincts, despite being domesticated. Can we satisfy those natural instincts in an indoor environment? I often explain to people that we must step outside our own minds and attempt to understand what it is that will make the animal feel comfortable, not what makes us feel comfortable. The sounds and smells of our surroundings, other cats, the location of furniture, litter boxes or the music we find enjoyable may be stress-inducing to the animal. For an indoor cat, seeing another animal out the window may result in anxiety or redirected aggression. Do we have the space, time, funds, and understanding to improve the life of the animal? Do we keep it just because we cannot bear to part with it? Can we empathize with the animal? These questions are imperative for any reputable shelter or rescue group to address when deciding to keep a cat in a shelter.

Our mission is, and always has been, to pick up and take in cats that other shelters or rescue groups won't. We will go out in frigid temperatures and snowfall so a stray, injured cat won't starve or freeze to death but will know the warmth of the indoors and have access to a dry bed and good food, even if only for a short time. We will weigh the pros and cons of keeping a cat confined to a shelter based on the animal's temperament and how it adapts to a new environment and being around other cats. We will continue to focus on a quality of life based on each individual animal and what that animal's needs are, not what *our* emotional needs are. We run Project Cat for the welfare of the cats, not for our own purposes. To the best of our ability we will continue to objectively assess the needs of those animals to make as good a life for them as is humanely possible.

Thank you for generously supporting our crucial animal welfare work.

Your donation makes a difference.



Gail Mihocko

Gail Mihocko
Director

In Memory Of...

I'd like to pay tribute to **Elizabeth Norment**, dear friend and avid supporter of Project Cat, who died way too young on 13 October 2014 from cancer. I met Elizabeth 12 years ago through her sister and best friend, Kate, who did volunteer work for us at the shelter. Elizabeth was upstate visiting when I asked if she would foster two older cats that we recently took into the shelter and were clearly not happy about being there. She did so wholeheartedly with the understanding that it was just to foster, as she already had two beloved cats. Long story short, Serenity (aka Reni), 12 yrs at the time and adored by Elizabeth, went on to live many more comfortable and pampered years. Jack, who was 9 yrs, lived on to 20 yrs of age and died in 2014 not long before Elizabeth did.

She had a Master's from Yale School of Drama and was an accomplished actress both in the theater and on screen. I attended her spectacular one-woman performance as Eleanor Roosevelt at the Berkshire Theater in 2008. Some of you might recognize her as guest Judge Arlene Brewer on Law & Order or most recently as Nancy, secretary to Keven Spacy's Frank Underwood in Netflix's House of Cards. She had a brilliant mind with a vivacious, sparkling and curious personality. She took a keen interest in the people she met and was passionate about animal welfare. She was a beautiful soul who is missed by many.

~ Gail Mihocko



Town of Wawarsing

In September of 2014 we presented a proposal to the town board requesting funds to help offset costs for assisting with homeless cats. We are pleased to announce that we were awarded a stipend of \$1500 for the calendar year 2015. Supervisor Leonard Distel and board members have been very supportive of our work responding to calls in the town and communities it comprises. Three years ago, and again in the summer of 2014, we tackled a serious hoarding situation that had been ongoing for decades in the village of Ellenville.

Grant Awarded

We are very happy to announce that the Cleopatra Fund of Community Foundations of the Hudson Valley awarded Project Cat a grant in the amount of \$1600 for the 2014 calendar year. These funds were used to purchase medicines for the routine care of new cats that come into the shelter. The Cleopatra Fund supports organizations involved in providing programs or services that promote animal welfare and programs designed for cats, dogs and retired circus and farm animals.

Special Thank You To...

- ⇒ **Charlie DeFraia** for donating his time and professional electrical skills
- ⇒ **Paul Bouros** for his carpentry expertise and helping to build our cat walks and ladders, installing air conditioners and helping to erect our new shipment of cages
- ⇒ **Glenn and Mark VanGorden** of Lucas Pet Supply for allowing us to showcase and adopt our cats through their store for 12+ years
- ⇒ All the volunteers who help at our tag sales: **Alex & Linda Averin, Dana & Dennis Balacic, Anne Bloomfield, Rayna Clarke, Michelle Gullickson, Lisa Hartwell, Roberta LaVoie, Lauren Marcus, Nancy Piccoli, Nancy Purdum, Brigitte & Frank Rahm, Geri Ritchie, Linda & Rik Rydant and Violet Streich**
- ⇒ Shelter/office volunteers: **Rayna Clarke, Rebecca Diamond, Chantal Kammrath, Nancy Purdum and Jim Yost**



Visitors from Japan

Last September we were fortunate to welcome four visitors from Japan who were touring various shelters in the United State as a means to reach out and exchange ideas with other like-minded individuals and professionals. The group came to us via Roundout Valley Animals for Adoption, a local dog shelter, whom we sometimes work with. Pets For Life, Japan shelter has been in operation about the same length of time as Project Cat but with a focus on dogs and with the intention of expanding their cat portion of the shelter. It was a delight showing them our shelter and conversing through an interpreter, Kinji Yamada of Canada (taking the picture and not in it). We are so honored that they chose to visit our shelter. Perhaps we can visit their shelter one day!

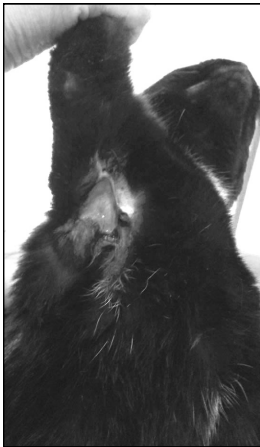
"Pets For Life, Japan is a small-scale community-based animal welfare organization in Nishinomiya, Japan. With support from more than a thousand community members, hundreds of volunteers and working closely with our local governments, we have found new homes for 500 dogs and cats with responsible and caring owners since 2000. Focus on quality of life for all pet animals and their owners is our utmost importance. That's why we found the operation at Project Cat truly inspirational. Regardless of our difference in cultural background, our thoughts towards improvement of animal welfare are universal, even across the ocean!"



Yuma, Risako and Chisato from Pets For Life, Japan with Gail Mihocko, Director of Project Cat



A Few of Our Storied Cats



Tisha - A lovely older and concerned couple called us from Grahamsville about a stray cat with kittens that they found in their shed. They had seen the mother 2 months earlier and managed to cut a collar off of her that was wrapped around her neck and front leg. But she ran off and had only just returned. Not having the means to care for them the couple brought the cats to us. A black mother cat with 4 black kittens. She had a large, infected wound from beneath her front leg with a cut that extended up the side of her body from where the collar had cut in and it had been festering for months. We cleaned up the wound and administered antibiotics - but the location of the wound made healing difficult. When we took her in for spaying at the Roundout Valley Mobile Clinic, Dr Avery Smith was kind enough to clip and stitch up the wound at a very low cost to us. Two weeks later the opening was only partially healed so once again he did some further work on the difficult to heal wound. The wound is finally healed over and it is only a matter of time until the last remaining stitches dissolve. A sweet and lucky cat ended up in a better place thanks to several caring humans.





Emerging from the trap on that frigid night.

Claire came to us during last year's frigid winter. We live trapped her after receiving a call about a cat that had been taking refuge huddled in the back corner of garage. Her attempts to run into the adjoining house were thwarted. We easily trapped her one night when the thermometer registered 5 degrees Fahrenheit and there was a biting wind. She looked quite frozen and thin and her eyes wide with fear. But it was her ears that made me cringe.



Raw wounds after the tips broke off for the first time.



In a warm cage with her dry, blackened ears visible.

The tops were all blackened and crumpled and "crispy" like toast. Frostbitten. And a little skin on the tip of her nose was raw. We gave her lots of warm bedding and little bits of warmed food so she wouldn't overeat. She seemed content to lie there and not move much. She let me put antibiotic salve on her tender and dried ears. It took many weeks and it was painful to watch the tips break off and bleed and then scab over and peel off again and again. But she was a cooperative sport through it all and eventually this little girl



Today, looking beautiful and content with her rounded ears.

started to fill in and look robust, and these days she is actually a bit chunky.

Claire is a shy and retiring cat, who likes to curl up inside cat beds. If you approach her and talk to her she gets so excited that she stands on her head and rolls over so her belly can be rubbed. She has been at the shelter over a year but as long as she thrives here she can call it her home until the right person comes along to give her a new home where she can be a loved and pampered feline.

Althea - It happened just by chance that I saw the black stray cat that I was told about walking atop the fence behind the store in Kingston. She didn't run but mewed at me and dipped her head upside down in that coy way that they do when they want some attention. It was now or never. I reached up, got a hold of her scruff, pulled her down and held her in that arm lock position that usually causes them to become immobile. I got her into the store into a carrier before she got antsy. A few yowls later she was calm and we drove to the shelter.

It was a busy time with lots of cats so she just got a quick check over and she was set in her little condo until spaying next week. For being out on the street she was a friendly little thing, obviously raised around people at some point. Her tiny nine month old body was carrying five fetal kittens that were aborted during the spay surgery. Practical for many reasons, including the fact that she had had a broken tibia and possible broken pelvis which could have caused difficulty during birthing with possible fatal consequences for her and the kittens. Her bones had already healed crookedly (hit by a car, kicked?) so she would have a permanently bowed out rear leg. But she gets around fine (she was atop a fence!) although can be a little clumsy jumping sometimes but she takes her spills with nonchalance. Yes, Althea is still at the shelter and waiting for a fabulous home.



The elegant, curious Althea with her white necklace

The Never Ending Hoarding Cases

Hoarding cases are never easy to take on because of the sheer numbers of cats and of the extremely poor condition most of them are in. There is nothing quite so hopeless a feeling as seeing dozens of sickly cats and kittens who are darting away in fear or are clamoring up your leg for attention and who have been living captive lives of squalor for years at the hands of humans unaware of or in denial of their situation. Living in their own waste amidst flies, fleas, cockroaches, moldy food, mountains of garbage and the smell of ammonia...nothing can ever desensitize one to the sight, smell and sorrow of such a place.

We usually take on a few hoarding cases a year depending on our time and funds available. Three larger ones that we worked on in the past 18 months included an outdoor situation in Esopus where we removed 65 cats and kittens during the summer. The woman was reluctant to let us remove the cats as she was very "attached" to them and they were her "babies". Which meant that she enjoyed spilling out bags of dry food and leaving cans of food all over the wooden deck that reeked of cat urine. When we approached the house the cats all scattered and took cover in the bushes and vegetation beneath the deck and peered out at us with drawn faces and hungry eyes. Kittens should be roly poly and playful but these kittens were just trying to survive with viruses and parasites that kept them lethargic. Imagine what the numbers would have been the following year if we had not intervened. Although many would not have survived the winter in their poor condition and would have died slowly.

A second one involved an ill woman who went into the hospital and the mess in her house was left to the daughter. As is common, none of the animals had been spayed or neutered and they were breeding out of control inside. Thirty cats were perched all over the kitchen counters, stovetop and table. Some cats were elderly with varying medical conditions. All had serious upper respiratory viruses and you could hear their wheezy and labored breathing. One mother cat lay in a dark, dirty corner behind an overflowing litter box nursing one surviving malnourished kitten. One male cat was so riddled with infection from bite wounds from fighting that he wedged himself in a small kitchen drawer and remained there for 3 days without moving until we were able to sedate him and pry him out. In our attempt to retrieve two scared cats from beneath a bed we discovered the carcasses of two other cats.

A third situation in Ellenville involved two elderly women who kept and fed countless hundreds of cats over the years without doing much else for them. Three years ago we removed over 50 cats from both indoors and outdoors and were called



About 300 fleas were removed from this emaciated kitten; the water turned red with flea dirt.

back in only to encounter another 37 cats inhabiting the place - this time there was the addition of tens of thousands of cockroaches inhabiting every corner of the house, walls, ceilings, cabinets, inside the refrigerator and covering every square inch of lawn and every object within 50 feet of the house. Trapping these fearful cats

was almost impossible as the moment a dish of food was placed on the ground it was infested with cockroaches within seconds. This was a long and laborious project with our hearts breaking at every cat we saw that was forced to live in this house of horrors, crouched in fear beneath the stacks of boxes, magazines, and clutter and inside closets stuffed with clothes, junk and items from 40 years ago. Not having hazmat suits, we wore rubber boots, hats and sprayed ourselves with insecticide before entering and shook the cockroaches off before getting into our cars.



Kitchen from where we removed Edwin and his first scared day at the shelter (insert)

Edwin is one cat in particular that we managed to

salvage from this house who emerged as one of the sweetest cats ever, despite him living the first year of his life curled up in a rusty old stove to escape the onslaught of intact adult male fighting. I managed to reach my hand down into the hole atop the stove, pull him out by his scruff of his neck and get him into a carrier. He spent the first few weeks hiding in the corner of his cage condo but would always purr and roll over for belly rubs when a hand approached him. Then one day he decided he was in a good place and sat at the front of the cage and meowed and he never looked back. He is still at the shelter with his friends Charlie, Clarence, Hazel, and Bonnie Lou waiting for his human soul mate.

Edwin and friend Clarence at Project Cat today.



A Shared Essay On the Plight of Animals and "No-kill Shelters"

By Daphna Nachminovitch

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I met Diablo years ago, when I was working at an animal shelter in Chicago. He was only 7 months old - a dashing border-collie mix with a curly tail and a huge personality. The reason given for turn-in: "Apartment too small." He'd been purchased from a pet store just a few months earlier. Diablo's owner explained: "I wanted a small dog. This one is too big."

My heart went out to Scram, too - a 5-year-old black-Lab mix with wise eyes. The reason given for turn-in: "Opens the fridge." And to Addison and Viking, both 7 years old - Addison a dignified golden retriever and Viking a handsome husky. The reason given for surrender: "Tired of taking care of." And to Carly, a beautiful retriever-mix who'd been with her human family for six years. She was intelligent and demure. The reason given for turn-in: "Moving overseas."

My family moved overseas when I was a child. And our two dogs moved with us from Israel to Ivory Coast to France to the United States. My parents would never have abandoned them - any more than they would have abandoned me.

But not all families see things that way. Diablo, Scram, Addison, Viking and Carly are just five out of millions of animals turned in to shelters every year. Failed by the people they trust and depend on, they are viewed as an inconvenience and discarded - given away indiscriminately, banished to the backyard or abandoned by the roadside to fend for themselves, terrified and alone.

And now, thanks to a growing trend toward "no-kill" policies, animals are also being failed by their last refuge: the shelter. Under pressure to report lower euthanasia rates, many shelters are resorting to "managing" their intake or outright rejecting animals they know will be difficult to place. We are being asked to buy the lie that as long as animals are not a euthanasia statistic, they are a success story. But one has to ask, "When shelters turn animals away, where do they go?"

In the few weeks leading up to Christmas, PETA received more than 120 calls about animals in need of somewhere to go. Among them were Storm, a pit bull who'd spent a miserable existence at the end of a chain and was in critical condition - barely mobile and urinating blood; Kora, a dog whose chain was embedded in her neck; Calvin and Hobbes, cats abandoned by a tenant who moved and left them behind; Midnight, a cat suffering from a hernia caused by a traumatic injury; Tyson, a dog who had been hit and mangled by a car; and Sugar, Abby and Tigger - cats in various stages of organ failure. There was also Jolene, a shepherd mix acquired via Craigslist on Christmas Eve but so aggressive that the family could not even feed her (they had called several agencies before contacting PETA, but no one else would help) and Star, a tiny, 11-year-old dog abandoned on Christmas Eve because her humans were expecting a baby. She was matted, scared, anemic and suffering from a flea infestation, severe dental neglect, an ear infection and kidney disease.

Diablo, Scram, Addison, Viking, Calvin and Star were adopted. Hobbes, Kora and Midnight are still waiting. But no one wanted Carly, and eventually she was euthanized, as are millions of other dogs and cats every year.

Animals rejected by shelters are not "saved" just because they've been excluded from unpleasant statistics. They don't vanish or magically find refuge elsewhere. Many suffer and die slowly from infections, injuries or illness, or they starve or freeze to death. It's easy to pretend that animals don't exist when they're statistically invisible, but such self-serving fantasies are at the animals' expense.

The answer to saving animals from homelessness and suffering doesn't lie in the closed-door philosophy that "if you don't count them, they don't count." It lies in preventing births through spaying and neutering, banning pet store sales, adopting animals instead of buying them, respecting animals enough to make a lifetime commitment to the ones we take in - and affording them all the opportunity to count not for the statistic that they represent but for who they are as individuals.

Daphna Nachminovitch is senior vice president, Cruelty Investigations, at PETA, based in Norfolk, VA