



No Human Address

Nola Foote

Copyright © 2009 All Rights Reserved

MENU

PAGE	CHAPTER
3	.....Introduction
4	.....Poem
6	.....Too Many Cats
20	.....Mother Cats and Kittens
36	.....Feral Cats
59	.....F.I.V Aids and F.E.L.V
72	.....Stray and Expendable
94	.....Good Cat – Bad Cat
102	.....Disposable Kittens
124	.....In Sickness and in Health
142	.....Kitten Bits and Cat Pieces
156	.....Cat Needs – Human Wants
170	.....Priceless Volunteers
177	.....Cats' Behaviour
187	.....Photo Gallery

INTRODUCTION

For over a decade I was a volunteer for the Cat's Protection League, (CPL) Canterbury Incorporated. I worked in the CPL's Opportunity Shop, sorting, selling and tidying. I provided thousands of plants for sale in the shop and collected donated goods in my Mazda 323 station wagon. When the office phone was unattended, I answered calls from members of the public in need of help for their own or stray cats. I collected and fostered helpless stray cats and kittens and housed them in my spare room and open cattery. Eventually when the rescued cats and kittens were well enough, they moved on into the CPL's cattery for re-homing.

In the following pages I have written many stories about both cats and cat owners. Every one is true and without embellishment. Every story was one I dealt with.

Should any human recognise themselves in an adverse light in any of the stories ... TOUGH!

To all of those caring humans who may have homed any of the cats who feature within these pages, give your pet a special kiss from me.

My twenty nine permanent cats include seventeen CPL boarder cats' - all absolutely un-homeable. Their stories appear within these pages. All twenty nine, ranging from Scotty a three year old to Geos, now seventeen, will live out their lives uninterrupted, warm, well fed, with plenty of trees to climb and oh so much love. We all need each other. Unfortunately for some, the certainty of a comfortable life is a challenge.

The old cat

One by one they pass my cage,
'Too old, too worn, too broken, no way.
Way past his prime, he can't run and play'
Then they shake their heads slowly and go on their way.
A little old man, arthritic and sore,
It seems I am not wanted anymore.

I once had a home, I once had a bed,
A place that was warm and where I was fed.
Now my coat is tattered and my eyes slowly fail,
Who wants a cat so old and so frail?
My family decided I didn't belong,
I got in their way, my attitude was wrong.

Whatever excuse they made in their head
Can't justify how they left me for dead.
Now I sit in this cage where, day after day,
The younger cats get adopted away.

When I had almost come to the end of my rope,
You saw my face and I finally had hope.
You saw through the grey and the legs bent with age,
And felt I still had a life beyond the cage.

You took me home, gave me food and a bed,
And shared your own pillow with my poor tired head.
We snuggle and play, and you talked to me low,
You love me so dearly and want me to know.

I may have lived most of my life with another,
But you outshine them with a love so much stronger.
I promise to return all the love I can give,

To you, my dear person, as long as I live.

I may be with you for a week or for years,
We will share many smiles, you will no doubt shed tears.
And when the time comes that God deems I must leave,
I know you will cry and your heart will grieve.

And when I arrive at the Bridge, all brand-new,
My thoughts and my heart will still be with you.

And I will brag to all who will hear,
Of the person who made my last days so dear.

CHAPTER ONE.

TOO MANY CATS

Coco, Katie, Salty, Amberlie, Missy (Miss Hiss), Mushroom (Boots), Emily, Elle, Ebony, Carrie, Avery and others

For some inexplicable reason, domestic cats are the most discriminated against and unprotected of pets. Dogs are required to be registered. Farm animals are constantly supervised and inspected. Birds have their sanctuaries. Cats however, are proclaimed to be the destroyer of birds and responsible for fouling the hay that cows eat. They are blamed for spreading Ringworm and Toxoplasmosis, both totally avoidable with responsible hygiene practices.

A domestic cat can be a friend. They won't pass on any secrets. When the cat's owner is depressed, the cat can sense the unhappiness. It will push its warm soft body hard against its owner and purr so its owner will reach out to receive the cat's comfort. With an unblinking stare, the cat will listen as its owner raves about the injustices heaped upon him or her and never interrupt. What better counselor could a cat owner have for the total cost of food, love, warmth and the occasional visit to the veterinarian? Cats unlike dogs have never been known to kill their owners.

City Councils enforce dog registration and dictate that certain breeds of dog be de-sexed. The same Councils refuse to consider any compulsory control of cats. If registration for cats was made compulsory, councils

could finance a compulsory de-sexing cat control program for both male and female cats. Certainly a more humane and even handed option, than the wholesale killing of female cats and their kittens, while leaving the male cat free to roam. Regulation of cats through registration and de-sexing programs would improve the welfare of cats and make it difficult for their owners to neglect them.

Most cat owners are responsible. They have their cat checked regularly by a veterinarian, ensure they are treated for fleas and worms and are vaccinated against cat diseases. They also have their cats de-sexed, both male and female.

Problems arise when would be cat owners collect kittens from any available free source, often give away columns in the newspaper or computer advertisements, and do not look beyond the cuddly ball of fur. These kittens grow up, become pregnant, sick or injured. They are no longer wanted. The kitten gets dumped and is left to fend for itself.

One unwanted kitten was Katie, an eight month old black and white, originally from Invercargill. She had a black smudge on her white nose and a very bushy tail. Unfortunately Katie's eyes were infected and full of yellow pus. Her owners were going to kill her. She was rescued, bought back to Christchurch and given away to a new owner. Her new owners didn't take Katie to a veterinarian.

For several months she was loved and handled frequently by her owners who did not appear to be

bothered by Katie's worsening, infected eyes. She was fed infrequently. She was eight months old when her owners were evicted from their flat. Left on her own, Katie was again rescued. She had ulcers in both her eyes, in her mouth and down her throat. She had Calici Virus and, if she was to get well, had to be isolated and medicated. Calici Virus is very infectious to other cats and is fatal in sixty to sixty five percent of infected cats. This undersized wee girl needed antibiotics, and eye drops. She also needed regular meals, warmth and quiet. Three weeks after her arrival into my care, Katie came into season and was spayed. If she had not been spayed, Katie would have produced a litter of up to five kittens nine weeks later. Had she not been rescued and cared for, it is unlikely that Katie would have survived. She would have died at one year old. As it turned out Katie was re-homed. The ulcer in one of Katie's eyes cleared completely, her other eye will always have clouded vision.

Katie's new owner agreed to contribute forty five dollars; a total that would not cover Katie's costs, but would get her a new chance at life.

Sometimes cat owners make poor choices for their cat. Salty was about a year old. She was a blue cream tortoiseshell, short haired, very confident and very pregnant. Her owner had decided to flee to Australia to escape a violent relationship. She took Salty to the emergency veterinarian the weekend before she caught her flight to freedom. She required the emergency veterinarian to abort Salty's kittens and ready her for re-homing. The veterinarian strongly suggested that Salty be spayed at the same time. The owner vehemently

refused. Salty was aborted, and five stitches were needed to close her wound. Three days later she was placed in my care to recover from her ordeal. A fortnight later her stitches were removed. A matter of only days after, Salty came into season. She again underwent surgery, this time for spaying. The distress and pain caused by two operations was avoidable. If a female cat is to be aborted, it makes sense to spay them at the same time.

Often cats become long term company for the elderly. Problems arise when those elderly owners die or have to move into a home. Their cats need to be re-homed and unfortunately, like their owner; those cats are also elderly and infirm.

An elderly lady cared for ten cats and a kitten at the time of her death. None of her immediate family were prepared to take the cats. The responsibility was eventually picked up by a distant nephew. He managed to find homes for five of the cats and the kitten. Out of options, he asked the veterinarian to euthanize the five remaining healthy cats. The veterinary nurse suggested he pay for an assessment of the five remaining cats and "We'll go from there." The cats were assessed, most had been de-sexed. Those that needed de-sexing were either spayed or neutered. All were vaccinated and finally re-homed. Re-homing doesn't always go smoothly.

The oldest cat, Amberlie, was a beautiful colourful tortoiseshell of eight years. Probably the original female of the ten, she was easily satisfied, cuddly, and purred constantly. She spent several weeks in the confines of a cattery awaiting a new owner. Eventually she was

chosen and taken to begin her new life; however the very next day, Amberlie was returned. She had refused to eat what her new owner considered was a good meal for a cat. "If she won't eat I don't want her," said the overweight owner. Amberlie had to wait several more weeks before she was found a home.

Coco, a black and white, six week old girl was rescued from the banks of the Waimakariri River by a young couple out exercising their dog. For ten years they cared for her. A second cat joined them when Coco was six years old; and when Coco was nine, a Golden Labrador joined the family. Circumstances changed.

The couple split up. The younger cat and the dog were to live with one part of the couple. Coco, at ten years old, was not wanted by either "rescuer".

Coco was delivered to the CPL with a generous donation. She was too old to be re-homed so she lives with me. Coco's behavior is interesting to say the least. Over the five years in my care she has at least progressed from hiding in any and every dark place, to sleeping in full view. Initially the vacuum cleaner caused her to disappear and stay hidden all day. Now she watches the machines movements from the window sill. For about the first six weeks, and twice a year since, she appears to suffer desperate depression, if cats are able to be depressed. Suddenly she refuses to eat her meals in her assigned place. Usually very friendly and tolerant of contact, she flinches and runs away from all touching. She hunches tightly anywhere in the dark and will only eat her meal if it is placed under her nose in her chosen hiding place. She will not venture outside the house.

Then as quickly as she begun her downward slide, she

begins to seek out human contact, she returns to her usual meal place and where she was only nibbling at her meals, she cleans her plate with gusto. She avoids all dark places and even enjoys rolling and scratching her back outside on the concrete in the sun. Most certainly, Coco is not able to be re-homed. She is too old and too odd.

Missy, was another cat needing to be re-homed after her owner died. She was a two year old, spayed, long haired tabby. Missy, being long haired, needed to be brushed and combed regularly. Missy's fur was in very good condition - no knots or tangles. The assumption was that she had been regularly brushed. Poor Missy! The moment she spied the brush she backed into the corner of her shelf, hissed, growled and clawed at the brush. She flinched each time the brush went close to her. Quite probably she had been disciplined by the brush. Five years on and she still does not like the brush but progress has been made. She no longer cowers or flinches when she sees the brush.

Missy was and remains a loner. Not one visitor even acknowledged her when visiting the catteries she was placed in. Over a year went by. Re-homing her proved unlikely. For the last four years, she has lived with me. Her name was changed to Miss Hiss. She lives in my large, open cattery with ten other misfits. Each morning, after she has slowly enjoyed every morsel of her food, she strolls out of the cattery into the garden. She enjoys her own company by day until half an hour before tea, when she seeks me out. She demands I sit down and she jumps up on my lap. That is her time with me and no other cat is allowed to intrude. When she has had

enough stroking and kissing she growls, jumps off my lap and heads back into the cattery for the night. Should anyone of the cats be stretched out in her special corner, one growl from Miss Hiss and her corner is immediately vacated.

The trials of everyday life can be responsible for cats being abandoned. Mushroom, a long haired tabby with white feet and a white chest, and her daughter Emily, a short haired tabby with beautiful aqua eyes, were rescued when their owner was committed to a mental health facility. Though both cats had been de-sexed their condition was poor. Mushroom had almost half of one ear sliced in a vee shape. It was hanging off the side of her head where it should have been attached. She was very thin and her fur was sticking up in little tufts. She was terrified and shivered as she dived under any covering she could squeeze beneath. Emily, though apprehensive and inclined to retreat to a corner, was less fearful of human contact than her mother. Mushroom was five years old, her daughter a year younger. The only food either cat would eat was dry biscuits and the only time they would eat them was at night when no human was hovering.

The process to change cats eating habits is often long and frustrating. On clean saucers, at eight o'clock in the morning and again at five in the afternoon, quality tinned cat food was offered to the two cats. On each saucer was also a generous helping of dry biscuits. To be successful introducing wet cat food into their diet, both types of food have to be offered. When no one was watching, these two girls scoffed the dry biscuits then slunk along the floor to hide - Mushroom underneath anything dark and

Emily in a corner. Cats hide underneath something dark so they can't be seen and in a corner so they can watch everything and have their backs protected and their claws free.

Slowly these two realised that not only were the dry biscuits palatable but the wet food was pretty tasty too. After three months, Mushroom was still ready to run from her food if the need arose. Emily however, enjoyed every morsel. She was chosen by a family who had other cats, a dog and children. Mushroom slowly realised she was safe. She still preferred dry biscuits, though some wet food was acceptable. Six months after she had been rescued, she was moved to the cattery from which she would be re-homed. Poor Mushroom. She reverted to the terrified wee girl she had originally been. She refused to eat anything, hiding in the basket in her pen, under the warm blankets which provided her comfort.

In three months she had lost all the weight and condition she had gained while in my care. She was returned to me and over the next six months she once more gained weight and confidence. At this point she was again moved to the re-homing cattery. Once again she crawled under the blanket in the basket and refused to eat. Once again she lost the weight she had gained. The decision was made that Mushroom would return to me and live her life with the other misplaced cats in my permanent care. Six years on and her name is now Boots. She is full of energy. She never walks if she can run - the faster the better. None of the very large boys will stand in her way. If they do, she hisses as she either rushes past them, or leaps over their heads. She still prefers dry biscuits and as she is so slight, she is fed both cat and kitten dry biscuits. Her main expectation of each day is to be

picked up from the drive every evening before her tea is served. She must be cuddled and kissed and she kisses me in return. I am happy to oblige!

Cat owners can endure great emotional pain to ensure their pets wellbeing. Elle was two years old, a short haired black and white girl, secure and loving when her owners moved from Christchurch to Tauranga. An elderly lady, a friend of Elle's owner, agreed to welcome Elle into her home, a stand alone villa in a retirement complex. The two got on beautifully, each supporting the other. When Elle's new owner vacated her bed each morning Elle would slide between the sheets and stretch out in the warm. The two friends had long conversations.

For three years, Elle and her new owner basked in each others company. The elderly lady had a stroke. As a consequence she was forbidden to drive her car and her independence was forfeited. Slowly this elderly lady had to admit to herself that should she have another stroke, no one would care for her precious Elle so she contacted the CPL. I visited the villa where Elle and her owner lived to collect the cat and settle her into my cattery before re-homing her. Elle's owner knew she had made the right decision - to re-home her Elle. It was a responsible but a very distressing and heart wrenching decision for her and she wept as I settled Elle into my carrying cage and collected all Elle's toys, and her special blanket.

Weeks later, after Elle had been moved from my care to the re-homing cattery, she was chosen by a middle aged couple. They willingly supplied their new cat with her own lazy boy chair. Elle's previous owner was contacted with the details of her new home. No tears this time, just giggles and appreciation.

Another owner whose circumstances changed also tried hard to re-home her cat, Ebony. Ebony was a seven year old, beautiful, confident, outgoing, and constantly purring, long haired black girl. The husband had been transferred to Australia and of course his wife and two children would go too. The decision to find a new home for Ebony was emotional for all four. Australian restrictions on cats are strict and the cat's freedom is curtailed. Ebony was not used to being confined behind closed doors so the decision was reached to leave her behind. A family friend and dog owner offered to give Ebony a new home. For three weeks Ebony hid underneath the bed in her new "home" to get away from the dog. She refused to be enticed out from under the bed. Finally, with the move to Australia only days away, Ebony's owner, in desperation, rang me. Many tears were shed as Ebony's owner delivered her into my care. For three months she lived in my cattery with several other cats until a space was made available for her to be transferred to the CPL's re-homing cattery. Four months later she was chosen by a growing family to live out the rest of her life with them.

Good intentions without long term commitment to an abandoned and often under socialised cat can leave the animal worse off. Carrie, a completely white, short haired wee girl lived between a fast food shop on one side of a car park and a tavern on the other. For months Carrie dived between the two, surviving on what she could steal. A male customer, feeling sorry for the ever visible scavenging cat, carried her home to join his elderly cat and his dog. Carrie, unused to living in a house and not in the least sociable or grateful, was promptly dumped outside and not allowed to enter. She went from

receiving attention, albeit being shouted at or chased, to little or no human contact.

Having had to scavenge for food around the car park, she now had no idea where the food was, if food would be provided or when. Two weeks after her arrival at her new home, a neighbour, distressed by the cats deteriorating condition rang for help. The neighbour delivered the cat to me. Carrie's ears were affected by cancer. She had not been spayed. She had a rear end injury, just above the point where her tail joined her back. She stumbled rather than walked. Three weeks after she arrived in my care she developed blocked anal glands, probably the result of eating too much fatty food. Carrie was unadoptable. No one wants a stumbling two year old white cat with chopped off ears. Carrie lived with my group of unwanted cats for eighteen months. She would not keep off the road. The other side always being better than the side she was on. A dog chased her. She ran across the road and was hit by a car and was killed instantly. She did at least have eighteen months of food, love and comfort which is more than an awful lot of unwanted cats ever experience.

Sometimes concerned people get it right from the beginning. An elderly lady noticed an emaciated four year old black and white cat scavenging for food. Realising food was the first step to improve the cat's wellbeing the lady began feeding the cat. The cat had to have come from somewhere, probably close by, she reasoned. She knocked on doors up and down the street, hoping to find an owner. No one wanted to know anything about a stray cat.

Even though she was being fed regularly, the cat's condition began deteriorating rapidly. I was rung to assist with the cat's rescue. The cat, lying in long grass beside a wire netting fence and barely able to lift her head was lifted into a cage and transported to the veterinarian. Avery, as she was latter named, was suffering from several large and very deep abscesses down her back. The poison from the infections was beginning to enter her blood stream. Without immediate surgery to drain and clean out the infections, Avery would die. The surgery was completed, and ten days of Clavulox, a broad spectrum antibiotic, was prescribed and administered night and morning.

With regular meals, plenty of love and a warm bed, Avery's health quickly improved. All the abandoned cats that I had dealings with were de-sexed before re-homing. So it was for Avery. She was booked into the clinic for her operation, two weeks after the completion of her antibiotics. First comes the shaving of the area where, if a female has already been spayed, a scar is almost always visible. Avery had no sign of a scar so the removal of her uterus and ovaries was begun. The operation, though reasonably serious and requiring three stitches to close the incision, became more serious when no reproductive organs were found. The incision had to be extended. Unfortunately for Avery, she had already been spayed. Five stitches instead of the usual three were now needed to close the wound.

Avery's original owner cared enough to have the cat de-sexed. What a pity they didn't have a microchip confirming she had been spayed, inserted underneath her skin, below her shoulder. She could have been spared the pain of the repeated and unnecessary

operation. Microchips also contain owner information. Avery's owner could have been traced. How she became a stray could have been tracked. Avery was chosen to be a companion for an elderly and recently widowed gentleman. Avery's special traits were that she intently watched anyone she cared for and gave her affection willingly.

Human cruelty has no bounds but is often offset by human kindness. An elderly blind cat was dumped on the bank of the Waimakariri River near Stewarts Gully. A couple out for a stroll came across a very distressed, crying cat. They scooped it up and carried it home. The next day they rang the CPL for assistance. A description of the cat was entered into the appropriate lost and found book in case any person had lost the blind cat. No inquiry was ever received. The cat was obviously not wanted. The couple who rescued the cat were rung to discuss its future. "No discussion necessary," they said, "If no-one wants him he can live what's left of his life with us."

Not all rescued cats lives have a happy ending. One day I visited the veterinary clinic with a stray girl in my care who, having been spayed, needed her stitches removed. Lying dead on the bench beside the sink was a very young brindle tortoiseshell cat. A woman was stroking the cat. She was weeping silently. I put my cat's cage down and walked over to the heartbroken lady. "Is she your cat?" I asked her.

The lady swung around from the bench and threw her arms around me. Sobbing, she told me she had trapped the very wild, wee girl at the Christchurch Polytechnic. She was one of many continually reproducing wild stray

cats.

"No-one cares," she cried, "I trapped her now she's dead. I betrayed her."

The woman cared enough to trap the cats. One by one, night after night, she would attempt to trap each and every one of a group of suspicious wild cats.

Most of the cats she trapped were able to be socialised so homes would be found for them but unfortunately some, like the tortoiseshell girl, would never be anyone's pet.

Regulation of cats through registration and de-sexing programs would improve the welfare of cats and make it difficult for their owners to neglect them. If all cats were required to be de-sexed when they were kittens, reproduction could not take place. Cats would be too precious to dump and there would be no need for caring humans to break their hearts over the decision they are sometimes forced to make. Prevention is always better than cure.

CHAPTER TWO.

MOTHER CATS AND KITTENS

Flicka, Shady, Cracker, Calico, Pepper (Ruby), Pixel and Biddy the dog, Lucy, Sky, Diamond, Minka, Maddy, and more

Pregnant female cats give birth to their kittens wherever it's dark, quiet, dry and as close as possible to a food source. Often stray pregnant cats will appear regularly on a compassionate human's doorstep looking for food. Cats are very intelligent creatures. They know they need constant nourishment to develop their expected family and they are very clever at persuading caring humans to give it to them. Pregnant cats will carefully choose a quiet, well hidden place to have their kittens well before their babies are due. Rarely will humans find a mother cat and her kittens and then only by chance.

Kittens are born in a sack of membrane which the mother cat will lick off as each of her babies is born. Even though kittens are born with their eyes closed they have no trouble finding a teat on their mother's tummy to latch onto. At only hours old, they will push and shove each other to suckle on their mother's most producing teat. Their eyes open from between five and ten days and are a dark blue. By the time the kittens reach six to seven weeks old, their eyes change into the colour they will keep.

It goes without saying that kittens cannot be procreated without the help of an un-neutered male cat. Many owners of male cats refuse to have their pet cat de-

sexed. Excuses given are "he doesn't have the kittens so why bother" or "let him have his fun." In a twelve year breeding cycle one female cat may produce around 3,200 kittens. A Council run compulsory de-sexing program, for both male and female cats, is more humane than the consequences endured by many female cats and their kittens.

Flicka, a tiny and very young, long haired tabby and white and Shady, a blue cream tortoiseshell were rescued only days apart and two kilometres from each other. Flicka had visited an elderly lady and her son twice a day, morning and evening. Feeling very sorry for the thin, furry waif the lady of the house began feeding the wee girl. As the cat's size began to increase dramatically, the son commented on the weight the cat was putting on. "You're feeding the cat too much," he commented. "But she is so hungry," was the reply.

Neither the son nor his mother considered their new charge could be pregnant.

Flicka's kittens were born in a wood-shed on their property. When the new family was discovered, all the sheds entrances and exits were firmly blocked up. Since I lived near by the task was given to me to collect them. A secure cat holding cage was needed for the rescue of Flicka and her kittens. I removed the hunks of heavy wood from the bottom of the shed door. Flicka, hearing these strange noises, left her three newly born kittens curled up in a jersey that the lady of the house had provided. She sprang up to the top of the wooden frame around the inside of the shed. The kittens were gently and without incident, placed in the cage but the rescue of Flicka was more complicated.

Flicka was terrified. She prowled, hissing and growling, around the top of the frame. I knew I would only get one chance to secure this shaking, crying frightened and panting cat. Quietly and slowly, I herded her into the corner of the shed. With one slow movement I managed to grab Flicka firmly by her scruff. With one hand on her scruff and the other under her shoulders, I slowly lowered her into the holding cage with her kittens. Flicka threw herself at the top of the cage attempting to claw her way out. Quickly I covered the cage with heavy dark blanket. Flicka, now in darkness, became quiet.

Five days earlier, I had rescued Shady, named because she was similar in colour to dappled shade. Shady had visited the property of a mother and her four year old son who lived in a house at the end of a long drive. As Shady became more pregnant, the concerned woman attempted to lure Shady into her house.

As Shady only appeared irregularly for food and as she became closer to delivering her kittens, rescue became urgent. When, one afternoon Shady appeared and was finally enticed into the house, the door was quietly closed behind her and the concerned rescuer called me. Shady was very heavy with her un-born kittens, and not very mobile. She was able to be quickly caught and lifted into a secure holding cage. A dark blanket was draped over her cage. Her four kittens were born two days before Flicka's.

Both Shady and Flicka were settled into their own cages in my spare room. Until the kittens were eight and ten days old respectively each cat ate, slept, fed their kittens then ate again. Though both cats were aware of each

other, no contact was made. At the same time a kitten emergency was unfolding in the vet clinic used by the CPL.

Two seven month old tabby girls had been discovered hiding in a house new tenants had moved into. One was undersized and very pregnant. She was no more than a kitten herself. She was aborted of four kittens and spayed. The other had delivered four kittens only one of which was still alive, a tabby and white male. The tiny sole surviving kitten, rejected by his mother, desperately needed a feeding mother cat. Hopefully Shady, the only available feeding mother, would accept one more mouth to feed.

I introduced him to Shady. She was unconcerned with the extra feeder but her now ten day old kittens were definitely unimpressed. These four kittens, twice the size though a week younger, pushed and shoved the interloper away, not allowing him to suck a drop. Time was against the survival of the little tabby and white boy, so a bottle and correct kitten formula was fed to him hourly while at the same time, he was gently laid against one of Shady's teats. The pushing and shoving slowly diminished as Shady's own kittens slowly accepted Cracker, as I had named him as number five. Within a week, all five kittens were drinking and sleeping peacefully. At last Cracker was one of the mob.

When Flicka and Shady's kittens were around four weeks old, both cages were left open during the day. At first and separately, all eight kittens began to explore their surroundings. Toys, including readily available milk bottle

tops, were provided for their entertainment. Shady and Flicka studied each other. Each night the mothers and their kittens were closed in their own cages. Slowly over a week, Flicka the more needy of the two, edged closer and closer to Shady, who just watched and waited. Flicka moved into one end of Shady's cage and stretched out in the sun. Shady stretched out in the opposite end of the same cage. At the end of the week both cages were left open at night as well as in the daytime.

Shady's kittens would rush into the cage, thirsty after their play and drink from Flicka, at her end of the cage, while Flicka's kittens would latch on to Shady. Cracker would drink from either cat. All the kittens had been weaned by six weeks but the comfort of a drink and cuddle against their mother's tummy was not to be missed. These two originally terrified cats thrived in the warmth of their open cages, the security of plenty of food and their dependence on each other. They would take turns feeding all of the kittens so the other cat could have some time out from her nurturing duties. Shady's idea of time out was stretching out in a chair too high for any of the kittens to reach while Flicka preferred to stretch out in the corner of the cage furthest away from the kittens. For the weeks until all the kittens were found acceptable homes, the total dedication between these two cats grew.

Two of Flicka's kittens were chosen by a couple in Linwood. They had a thoughtful way of helping the furry homeless. Christmas was close, so the couple asked every member of their family to donate the money they would spend on presents to the care of abandoned cats. Their "collection" was donated to CPL and gratefully accepted. When all the kittens were homed, Flicka and

Shady were spayed. A veterinarian check disclosed a broken and abscessed back tooth in Flicka's mouth. She had probably been hit in her face by a hard object. The tooth was removed and a weeks worth of Clavulox, a general antibiotic, was administered in her food for seven days.

Flicka and Shady were treated for worms and fleas, and vaccinated. The time had come for them to move out of the spare room. Shady froze when she was handled. Flicka fought desperately. As neither cat would ever find a new home, Shady the feral cat and Flicka the terrified, cowering, hissing, spitting cat were settled into my airy, open cattery. They were inseparable. They slept together. Flicka would hide behind Shady when she felt threatened. They ate their meals side by side and only when no one was watching. They stretched and rolled in the sun, Flicka never far from Shady. Very occasionally they would be found on their own in different rooms of the cattery, but the slightest noise and Flicka would scurry behind Shady for protection.

Almost one year after her arrival, Flicka had her first fit. She had sat hunched and very still all morning. I gently lifted her from where she had hunched down. She flopped, and then began spasming, her back paws reaching over her head. She was rushed to a veterinarian but by the time she was examined the fit was over and she was totally limp. Three days later Flicka had another fit and was again rushed to the emergency veterinarian. Two more fits followed, each one leaving this poor wee girl much weaker, unable to move and crying in pain. Two weeks after her first fit, the agonising decision was made to put Flicka down.

Following Flicka's death, Shady was released from the cattery. For several months she appeared at different times, sometimes venturing inside my house but mostly requesting her meals outside. She would be found curled up in the sun, always with one eye open and ready to run. Finally she settled for dinner at seven pm and dry biscuits later, at nine. Months passed and she altered her demands to breakfast at seven and dinner in the dark. She is now rarely visible throughout the day. She gets on famously with any other cat she meets. Four years on and Shady has reverted to the feral cat life she prefers. She lives in the grounds of my neighbour's house. She prowls in the dark and mixes with all the other night cats who reside in the area. She is a very healthy, rotund girl obeying her own rules in her own time. Would she have been any different if Flicka had lived? Probably not.

Some pregnant cats are very secretive and manage to avoid coming to any ones notice. Calico, a large brindle tortoiseshell girl had her five kittens underneath a house in Shortland Street. Until the kittens were moving around, approximately four weeks old, the owners of the house had no idea of the family living beneath their floorboards. By the time the house owners could secure the family in a cage, the kittens were eight weeks old. Two kittens were given a home by the house owners. I collected Calico and her three offspring for eventual re-homing. One, a black, very sociable boy, was found a home within days of arriving in my care.

The last two kittens of Calico's litter were terrified of human contact. One was black and the other had Calico's colouring. After six months and countless hours

of talking and handling, the two small struggling, scratching, biting kittens, were finally socially adjusted enough to be found a home. Calico, an undemanding cat was spayed before she was re-homed. She was chosen by a man who worked at night and wanted a cat for company but one who didn't necessarily need stroking or constant attention. That arrangement would suit Calico admirably.

Some cats have a home but are neglected. They become sick and are not taken to a veterinarian. They get sicker and without intervention will die. Pepper, a short haired black and white very young cat, had her five kittens in the garden between two flats owned by Christchurch City Council. A concerned tenant carefully collected Pepper and her newly born kittens, placed them in a box, and called me. It was nearly midnight. I persuaded the concerned tenant to keep the kittens and the mother cat in a closed room over night. I would collect the tiny family first thing the following morning.

Unfortunately, the mother cat managed to escape. The tenant, knowing who actually owned the cat and being aware the kittens would not survive without their mother, cradled the five kittens in her hands and knocked on the owner's door.

She offered him his cat's kittens. "Chuck them in the rubbish and chuck that cat in after them," she was told. The concerned, now distressed tenant went back to her flat and called me again. "Please come now. I don't know what to do," she sobbed.

By the time I arrived, Pepper had also returned to her flat and to her kittens. Mum and her five premature kittens

were collected and settled in a warm cage. All went to the veterinarian later that day. Pepper was a very sick cat. She was diagnosed with septicemia. She had not developed nipples to feed her premature babies and she wanted no contact with them. They were too small to hand rear so one by one they all died.

Pepper took months to socialise. Finally she was moved from my care into the CPL re-homing cattery. After two months there she began pulling her fur out - a sure sign of distress so Pepper was returned to me. Several months later, a second attempt was made to find her a home. She was again moved to the re-homing cattery. Her first new owners returned her after a week, saying she was "an unsatisfactory pet." Three weeks later she was chosen by a young couple who changed her name to Ruby. They put time and effort into their new arrival and were rewarded with Ruby's acceptance.

Some cats, used to being pets, take a risk with another human and embark on a head on approach to get help. Pixel, named after the dots that make up pictures on a computer, arrived at the ranch slider doors of a house built at the rear of a block of flats in South Brighton. She was skin and bone and desperately hungry. The house owners fed her, and as soon as her meal was finished, Pixel disappeared. She arrived back at the ranch sliders at tea time. For several weeks the process was repeated. As Pixel gained weight, the lady of the house walked the area knocking on doors attempting to find an owner. Pixel had a red plastic collar around her neck and someone had put it there. I was contacted and collected an obviously heavily pregnant Pixel.

I settled her into a warm cage in the spare room of my

very small house. I had collected her on a Saturday, and an appointment had been confirmed for her to be aborted and spayed two days later, Monday. Late the second night in my spare room, Pixel began crying and scratching at the covering on the floor of the cage she was in. Blood was visible on the floor coverings. Pixel was about to give birth. As Pixel became more distressed, I laid this very young, black and white wee girl on the bed and lay down beside her. Several hours later, Pixel's three cream tortoiseshell kittens were born and Pixel was exhausted but content. The wee family was moved back into a cage and Pixel rested while her kittens searched with uncoordinated motions for their mother's teats. The kittens thrived.

When the kittens were seven weeks old, Pixel came into season. She yowled, became very restless and began climbing the wire netting screen covering the open window. She was spayed within days. Pixel and her kittens had complete run of my house in the evenings. The story was about to take an unexpected turn. Biddy, very much a "bitsa" and a cat friendly dog also had the run of the house. The kittens were very interested in the dog. They would sneak up to the tip of her tail, touch it with their paws then run away. Their Mother would viciously attack this most friendly dog. At first the conclusion was Pixel was defending her kittens but when all the kittens had gone to homes, Pixel's attacks became more frequent and vicious. She would jump onto the dog's side, dig all her claws into the dogs flesh and hang on. Biddy became a nervous wreck. Initially we wondered if she thought the dog was responsible for the disappearance of her kittens but this proved unlikely as several friends and the odd tradesman visited in the

company of their dogs and Pixel attacked each dog in turn.

Her attacks on Biddy became more regular and vicious and eventually Biddy snapped back. The two animals were separated. Since Pixel violently attacked all dogs, she could just as easily be attacked in return and possibly killed. It would be unwise to re-home her. A process was agreed to resolve the situation. For several weeks Pixel and Biddy were kept apart.

When Pixel was outside in the garden, Biddy was kept inside. After an hour the positions were reversed, Biddy was escorted outside and Pixel was confined to the spare bedroom. After several weeks, the two were allowed to mingle. Pixel circled a very wary Biddy. Eventually they agreed to tolerate each other. To be safe, when visitors with dogs came around, Pixel was scooped up and confined until all visiting dogs had finished loitering in the garden. Now, several years later, a more sociable cat would be hard to find. Perhaps before she was rescued she had been attacked by a dog and decided "attack is the best method of defense."

Kittens are often dumped in the hope someone else will look after them. One Wednesday morning in February, a shoebox was found outside the CPL opportunity shop where I worked. Tiny holes had been made in the lid, and a piece of rag had been thrown onto the bottom of the box. Seven tiny kittens were inside. Six of the kittens were black and one was white and grey. There appeared to be two litters of kittens. Three kittens were slightly smaller than the other four. Since cats rarely have more than five kittens per litter it also suggested two litters were involved. The three smaller kittens, all black,

appeared to be about ten days old while the other four were possibly three or four days older. All the kittens were cold and hungry, for them to survive, several lactating mother cats would have to be found immediately. Several phone calls turned up no available mothers so the kittens were divided, I took four and another volunteer took the other three.

The survival of kittens as young as these seven is unpredictable. They had to be hand fed with a specially made up milk formula six times each and every day until they were old enough to wean, between four and five weeks old. They were fed through a syringe with a soft, longish teat pushed on the end of the syringe. The milk was of course given to them warm, as one would a small baby. Kittens need their tummies stroked down towards their genitals to make them defecate and stroked over their genitalia to make them urinate. These motions are done automatically by the kitten's mothers as kittens cannot wee or poo without help.

With no mother, the human surrogates had to complete the ablutions after each feed. All these tiny kittens needed their faces washed carefully or the overflow of milk would stick to their faces, dry and harden. After each feed, they were gently scooped up for a cuddle. As their eyes began to droop and they became very sleepy they were put back to bed in a small basket or box. A hot water bottle was put underneath the clean, soft, warm blankets they would sleep on.

Diarrhea is unfortunately very common in tiny kittens being hand raised and is often fatal. The smallest wee girl, later named Diamond, developed diarrhea. For three

days her life hung by a thread. She survived. However, eight days after the kittens arrived, without any warning, and overnight, one of the four kittens died. Why it died remains a mystery. The general diagnosis is FKS, fading kitten syndrome. Perhaps FNR, (for no reason), should replace FKS. So much love and effort goes into hand rearing very small kittens and heartbreak is never far away.

Diamond's siblings were named Lucy and Sky. They were quite slow to catch up to kittens who had been raised by their own mother. They developed into human oriented kittens, playful, and happy to eat anything. All three would curl up in my arms and sleep any time. They were very sociable kittens. Suitable homes were found for all three. Lucy and Diamond live in a family with two little girls, one five and the other six. Sky lives in Belfast with a tabby mate.

Not all dumped mothers and their babies fare well. A long haired brindle tortoiseshell cat, about two years old, was rescued in a huge expanse of waste ground. Rubbish had been dumped among the yellow flowering broom growing thickly around a large hole in which she had hidden. A Christchurch City Council notice, "Dump No Rubbish," was displayed for all to read. Thankfully, Minka, as she was later named, couldn't read. Minka and her two kittens came into my care on a day that was one of the hottest Christchurch had seen for many years.

Minka and her two kittens were at risk of dying from heat exhaustion and lack of fluids. Two of her kittens were already dead. Luckily all three did manage to survive

and, though Minka had lost two of her babies, the surviving family all were found alternative, secure homes.

Stray cats are seen by some to be a nuisance to be disposed of and plans are made to secretly dump them. An elderly lady had been feeding a very young smoky grey and white stray cat for several weeks. Her daughter noticed the cat had had kittens. The stray had several raised teats so the mother cat was evidently feeding kittens who were probably hidden inside the garage. The daughter set about blocking up every opening into the garage so the wee mother could not get to her kittens to feed them. She informed her elderly mother that she would return for the cat and kittens the next evening and would dump them in the country.

Extremely upset the lady pleaded for immediate help. I drove to the property with my secure holding cage. The mother cat was very friendly with the lady. I suggested she feed the cat in her kitchen and when the food was being consumed she could close the door to keep the cat inside. The mother cat was easily secured. The blocked up garage was large, full of planks of wood, plastic containers, pieces of carpet and several cardboard cartons. Carrying the holding cage I walked slowly around the garage, examining every nook and cranny that kittens could be sleeping in. Four beautiful three week old kittens were curled up at the far end of a long cardboard carton, sound asleep. They were rescued, taken into safe care and eventually, when the kittens were old enough, all were found new homes.

Some people blatantly dump unwanted animals without a second thought. Two teenagers were relaxing under the

bridge of the Waimakariri River. A car stopped on the bridge above them. The male driver opened the car door and threw a box into the river. The box contained a mother cat and her kittens. The teenagers were horrified. They waded into the water and saved the family.

Unfortunately they were too busy saving the mother and her kittens, all of which were re-homed, to record the registration number of the dumpers car. Would anyone have cared if the teens had secured the cars number? I'd like to think so.

Another blatant dumping involved a ten month old, silver tabby and white wee girl. She was desperately emaciated, and along with her two kittens had been shoved into a cardboard carton that had been taped securely. The carton was left outside the New Brighton Veterinary Clinic to be discovered when the nurses arrived for work. The abandoned animals were quickly transferred into my care. One of the kittens, a girl, was the image of her mother, a short haired tabby and white, and the wee boy was black and white. All were extremely underweight. Maddy, as the mother was later named, had five available teats which suggested she had given birth to at least four kittens. Maddy's ribs were visible to the naked eye and could be counted at a distance of one metre. All her vertebrae were countable and the two bones at the end of her torso in front of her tail were poking through her fur. She wouldn't have been any more than eight months of age when her babies were born.

For two months this refugee family ate kitten food, initially six meals daily, then as their weight increased, down to four meals daily. The kittens were approximately six weeks of age when they were rescued. Two months later

they had developed into sturdy, sociable playful kittens. They were vaccinated and homes were easily found for them. Maddy had been in my care for twelve weeks before she was strong enough to be spayed. Homing her was not going to be hard. Saying good-bye to the graceful, proud, sociable girl she had developed into would be.

Too often cats and their kittens are left undernourished, sick and close to death, on someone else's doorstep. A Council run compulsory de-sexing program, for both male and female cats, is more humane than the consequences many female cats and their kittens must endure. Prevention of exponential births has to be preferable killing the ever increasing unwanted number of kittens.

CHAPTER THREE.

FERAL CATS

April, Geos, Cleo, Mr Five, Meg. Jasper, Jack, Jinx, Jiminy, Iris, Willy, Hugo plus

Feral cats are domesticated cats that have returned to their wild state. Feral cats are usually the off spring of either stray or other feral cats. They do not engage with humans. Stray cats were pets at sometime who were abandoned or lost. A stray may or may not revert to its wild state. Kittens born to a stray cat if not socialised will grow up feral. Stray cats are tame. Feral cats are not. A feral cat colony grows rapidly.

The breeding season begins as soon as the weather becomes warmer, July to August and finishes when the weather becomes cold, April to May. Over twelve years a female cat may deliver about 3,200 kittens. Female cats, hardly more than kittens themselves, come into season around four months of age. Once pregnant, gestation is nine weeks after which they usually give birth to four kittens. When these kittens are only a few weeks old the mother cat may become pregnant again with another four kittens. When her first litter is four months old, they too will very likely become pregnant. Four months later the original mother cat will have produced yet another litter. Three litters in one year or about twelve kittens. Six of the kittens she had are likely to be female, two from each litter. These six kittens will probably have at least one litter of four kittens each. Twenty four kittens in total. So far the mother and her female kittens have produced a total of thirty six kittens. If two kittens from each litter

were female, as probability suggests, then there are now eighteen kittens able to breed the following season. The result is seventy two new kittens, half which will be female and the cycle begins again. Kittens born without human contact become aggressive. They are feral.

Some organisations say that feral cats should be culled. Trapped and killed. They argue that the number of cats within the colony will drop. This is a short-sighted approach for two reasons.

Firstly, nature responds to dwindling cat numbers by increasing the average number of kittens born. Secondly, any cat removed from the colony leaves a space for another un-de-sexed cat to move in. The new cat is likely to be fitter and healthier therefore quicker to breed. The net result of a cat control program which traps and kills cats will encourage growth of the colony.

An alternative, backed by International research*, advocates Trap, Alter and Release (TAR) programs. Feral cats are trapped, the sick are euthanised, the rest are de-sexed (altered) then released back into the same colony. With less females coming into season and less males able to mate, kitten numbers are reduced. The colony reduces in size over time.

Unfortunately few people understand the fundamentals of cat control and happily feed feral cats without being committed to a trap alter release program. The colony grows and becomes a bigger problem. A City Council wide compulsory de-sexing program which invites public participation, (feeding of cats) and includes TAR for feral cats, funded through registration, may help elevate the status of the cat from pest to pet.

It is usual for feral cats to live in colonies but exceptions do happen. A concerned couple had an old car body out of sight, in the corner of their large section. Living in the darkest place, underneath the seat where the springs had burst through the seat covering, was a feral mother cat and her four kittens. The mother cat fled leaving her kittens unattended when either of the couple approached. Wanting to help the new mother but not knowing how, they asked for advice. The first priority was to feed the mother and handle the kittens as often as possible. Kittens, even though their mother is feral, are easily socialised if they are regularly picked up, cuddled, played with and talked to when they are very young.

*A comprehensive long-term program of neutering followed by adoption or return to the resident colony can result in reduction of free-roaming cat populations in urban areas. (*J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2003;222:42–46)

The second and most important priority was to trap the mother cat. One way to do this was to persuade her to enter the house where she could be contained. A long process. The mother was finally trapped about four months later in the house owner's wash house. A string was tied on the handle of the wash house door and pulled through the open window opposite. When the mother was finally enticed into the wash house for her expected evening meal, the door was pulled shut behind her. She was spayed and vaccinated. She was definitely feral so would never be anyone's pet. She lives outside and visits in the morning for breakfast and in the evening for her tea. All four of the kittens were socialised and de-sexed. The house owners became so fond of the whole family, that they kept all four kittens saying, "Even though it cost us quite a bit we managed. We love them all too

much to give them away."

Another mother who didn't live in a colony was April. She is a short haired smoky grey tabby with striking green eyes and was discovered by accident at an Aldershot address in Aranui. A Korean lady was searching in her shed among several tightly packed cardboard cartons for something she couldn't find but knew she had packed. She accidentally kicked the bottom carton of the stack and April flew out. Further investigation revealed four ten day old kittens. The concerned lady knew the wee mother cat had to be fed so she could feed her kittens so a diet of sushi, fish and rice was offered and consumed.

Having only a limited knowledge of English and insufficient language skills to ask for help, she finally approached her English teacher who had given a lecture to her adult students on the acceptable care of cats. The teacher, a CPL volunteer, accompanied her pupil to her address, placed the tiny kittens in a holding cage, left food in the cage for the mother and careful instructions for her pupil to close the cage when the mother began eating the food. The teacher had just returned to her own home when her very excited pupil rang to report that she had the cat in the cage. All five felines were then delivered to me and settled into the spare room. Next day they went to the veterinarian.

Three of the four kittens had infected eyes. Conoptol ointment, squeezed into the corner of each kittens affected eye, twice daily, cleared the infection. April had a bowel infection which required antibiotics twice a day. After seven days medication, April's diarrhea had disappeared, but unfortunately it reappeared three weeks later. After another week's medication, she was spayed.

April's four kittens, three black and white girls and a tabby boy were found homes.

April moved from the spare room into my open cattery. Even after two months of regular food, the contact of several other cats, plenty of sun and human contact, she still froze and shook violently each time she was approached. She was comfortable only with other cats. April had been in the cattery for four months when she developed diarrhea once again. Her diagnosis was permanent inflammation of her bowel and was the end result of having too many litters of kittens too young, too little food and too much neglect. She would have to be fed a special diet. For almost a year, April continued to shake and cower while her eyes flickered and her head ducked at any sign of human approach. After the first two years of interaction with me she has relaxed at my approach and actually seeks stroking.

April had claimed a very sunny corner of the cattery so when she jumped up for her stretch in the sun and found another cat had beaten her to her corner she was not amused. She crept along the shelf to where he was lying, sniffed his rear then slid back out of his reach and waited. The cat glared at her then hissed and moved further into the disputed corner. April crept towards him again and patted a place on his back higher up than she had previously sniffed, jumped back again and waited. Once more he hissed his annoyance then moved even further into the disputed corner. At April's third pat on his back he growled and jumped down away from the corner shelf. April could literally be seen grinning as she stretched out in "her" corner in the sun. Four years on and April has insisted on living inside the safety of my

cattery. She goes out into the garden after breakfast and is first back into the cattery at night.

Rarely does a feral cat become a loving pet but if they are de-sexed, fed and allowed to make their own trade offs, they can become quite companionable at a distance of their choice.

As well as feeding any stray cats each night I also fed the resident hedgehogs with tinned cat food. I was surprised to discover the "Hedgees" shared their food willingly. Some feral cats have been known to bond with the human who rescues them. They can become devoted friends. One such cat slunk along the side of my garage very late one night, searching for the food he knew was available for the hedgehogs. A quick flash of the torch on the cat's rear end, identified a non-neutered male. He crept up to the opposite end of the dish the hedgehog was eating from and gulped his fill. At first inspection, and from a distance, the very black cat appeared to be about five months of age. A ragged deep split in one of his ears had healed. His bones were poking through the fur where his back legs joined the spine just above his tail. His fur was sticky and standing stiff in tufts. The cat watched me as he scooped the food he shared with the hedgehog, growling and continually moving, ready to run. When the dish was empty, the black shadow fled. The following night, the cat re-appeared and again shared his food with the hedgehog. He was given a name, Geos, the first letters of the computer programme, Graphic Environment Operating System. Why you ask? He like Pixel, was named by my son, a computer geek.

Each night Geos's visits became earlier and earlier. He would eat then bolt, growling and snarling, then re-

appear the following night even earlier. After two months of eating nightly, he discovered breakfast was also available and he didn't have to share with his hedgehog friend. He developed a skin condition which looked like ringworm above one eye which quickly traveled downwards and infected a large part of his face. Unable to examine the feral cat, the veterinarian agreed to treat Geos for Ringworm, a diagnosis based on my description of the lesion. Grisovet was prescribed and administered once a day for twenty eight days in his food. One week after his first dose of Grisovet, a slight improvement was noticeable.

After four weeks the Ringworm was gone. As the weeks turned into months, Geos became more approachable. I could reach out and touch him but could not pick him up. He settled into a routine.

He expressed his thanks for the food he was given by patrolling the fences surrounding my section. Any cat who did not live with his "human" was loudly chased off. After ten months of constant care, Geos allowed me to actually pick him up. Once I could handle him it was off to the veterinarian. The nurse would be the target of Geos's long, sharp claws, and extra strong teeth, so a sedative was prescribed. Even though he was quite doped, Geos was his usual attacking self. His de-sexing was successfully carried out. Amazingly, all concerned didn't loose a finger, hunks of flesh or litres of blood. His age was put at five years not five months.

Where ever I am in the garden Geos is nearby. One sunny afternoon, months after he had been de-sexed, I was sitting relaxing underneath a gum tree. With a strangled meow and a thump Geos landed at my feet. In

his mouth he held a dead starling. He gently laid his offering at my feet, backed away, sat down, tilted his head to one side and waited for the praise he expected. The "offering" was the most precious gift a cat could share, his food. I thanked him, stroked him, told him I would enjoy his dinner, and when he had disappeared buried the poor bird. Except for that one time, bird catching is forbidden in my garden. Transgressors are sprayed with the ever ready garden hose till they release their prey which is taken from them and immediately buried.

Geos rarely needs to visit the veterinarian. He gets sick infrequently and when he does it is usually the result of vicious fighting. Any wounds heal quickly with the use of antibiotics. Now, seven years later, his trade off negotiation is "feed me and I will sleep in your house like you want me to, but only if it is cold." No doubt as he gets older, a soft warm bed will be too comfortable to resist.

Sometimes the best thing to do for a feral cat is to leave them in the surroundings they know. In October 2005 the secretary from the Royal Furniture Manufacturer in Ferrymead rang the CPL for help.

A stack of cartons was being moved by a front end loader. At the bottom of the pile of cartons, tucked away in the back corner of one of the empty boxes were five, two day old kittens. Their mother was nowhere to be seen. Help was urgently needed to rescue this deserted family. Without the mother, hand rearing of such young kittens is almost impossible. The concerned secretary collected a trapping cage. The cage was made of heavy wire, over all sides and on the bottom. She was advised

to line the cage and especially the bottom with readily available cardboard, put a shallow box at the farthest end of the cage, line it with soft cloth and lay the kittens on the cloth. The mother had to get past the trip hook which hung down into the cage. Food is usually required to trap a cat but in this case the kittens, warm on their blanket, hungry and squealing, should be the only bait their mother needed. When the hook was bumped it would secure the door behind her, trapping her inside with her kittens. Once the mother was inside the cage, the secretary was to cover it with a blanket and call me.

The secretary followed instructions to the letter. I collected the cage with mother and kittens inside and took them to the veterinarian. He examined the kittens, one ginger boy, one calico tortoiseshell and white girl, two leopard spotted tabby girls and one wee black boy. The first four kittens were all pronounced fit and healthy but the wee black boy was not well. The veterinarian estimated he had less than a fifty percent chance of survival.

The cage was on the floor of the consulting room so the veterinarian got down on the floor, and inspected mother, a brindle tortoiseshell, from the outside. She had jammed herself into the farthest corner of the cage, trying desperately to claw her way through the wire. "How feral are you?" he wondered out loud and slowly eased his hand into the cage. She shot out like a bullet.

She sped under every table and in her frenzy, she flew up onto the bench with all the instruments, medications, boxes, and thermometers scattering them everywhere. She dived over and over at the window that runs full length of the consulting room desperate to escape. Using

a large dark blanket the veterinarian crept carefully up behind her, while she was distracted by throwing herself at the window, and managed to secure her.

He completed a rapid visual inspection. She had an injury on a shortened tail. It had probably been severed in a trap leaving her about a quarter of her tail. The wound was healed and as far as the he could see, she was in good health and well nourished. The factory where she had been found had been a good source of food.

I took the new family home and put up the large cage in my spare bedroom. The cage is a metre high, one and a half metres long and almost a metre wide. I put a cardboard box lined with soft blankets in the bottom in the cage and gently lifted the five kittens into the box. Mother was much more difficult to settle. I couldn't get near her to lift her in with her babies. I slid the trapping cage through the door of the new cage and tilted it higher and higher until the mother cat shot out of the trapping cage and went to her kittens. I put a litter tray on one side of the cage. Kitten food, which has better ingredients for a feeding mother, and water were placed on the opposite side. The whole cage was covered with a dark blanket and they were left alone to settle into her new surroundings. All the cats I foster have to have a name. I chose Cleo for this new arrival. Hopefully Cleopatra would have approved. She would kill anyone who harmed any of her cats. Maybe Cleopatra had a point.

The first day Cleo was with me I just talked to her. The seven and a half weeks she lived with me, she only ate and used her litter box when no one was anywhere near

her. If she was eating and I went into her room, she scrambled back into her box with her kittens and glared at me.

The five kittens, though born to a feral mother, needed to be given love, correct food, handled regularly and checked by the veterinarian. One by one, several times each day, the kittens were taken out of the box in the cage, put on a warm blanket, each one cuddled and talked to then returned to the box. Cleo tolerated the exercise. She didn't take her eyes off her kittens but allowed me to touch her babies without attacking.

Every day the bedding had to be changed. It was a major undertaking. The kittens could be removed easily, as long as I maintained eye contact with Cleo. The blanket on the bottom of the box could be gently eased over the top of her, another already warmed blanket could be laid in its place and the kittens could be replaced in the box. Kittens lose body heat very quickly so warmth when moving them is essential. The dirty blanket over the top of Cleo could then be eased out from underneath her and the clean one eased alongside her. When the door of the cage was closed and no one was watching her, Cleo would scratch the clean blanket underneath her self, get comfortable again and all would be serene until the next day. Cleo was never pleased with the daily replacing of one blanket for another but she accepted it. Her stare was unwavering throughout.

The wee black boy, named Mr Five, needed supplementary feeding. He was the last born and was always pushed away from the teat by his bigger siblings. I bought some specially formulated kitten milk from the supermarket, added some warm water and fed the wee

boy through a syringe. He loved the extra milk. He would slurp and gobble and swallow and when he'd had enough, he would flop back in my hand, totally relaxed, his tiny tummy full. When he was put back with his siblings, he would lie on his back, his head stretched up, both paws, front and rear crossed. His wee mouth would stay open. If he could snore with contentment he would have. His brothers and sisters grew quickly and though he tired more quickly and slept longer, he made up for his small self by tearing around faster and more energetically than his bigger siblings.

His body grew slowly and he developed into a cuddly, smooch who demanded attention whether I wanted to give it to him or not. He was not quite five weeks old when he discovered real food. Suddenly he didn't need the extra milk. He was first into the food dish, feet and all. Kitten food was offered four times a day and kitten biscuits were available all day. Often humans give kitten's cat food and wonder why diarrhea is the result. Human babies don't eat adult food either.

The kittens were now eating and drinking from saucers and filling up after their meal with their mother's milk. They began to use the litter tray. Their first poo was a tiny corkscrew of faeces. White kitty litter was spread sparingly on the bottom of the litter tray. Often at the first few tries, the litter box is missed altogether. Placing the box on newspaper makes for an easy cleanup.

Cleo was a brilliant mother. Her babies crawled all over her, chewed her ears, jumped on her, had squabbles on top of her side and tried to chew her mouth. Gently she moved her attacked parts away from her baby's

movements. The cage door was now left open and the kittens had grown enough to jump down onto the floor and investigate. They began sleeping together in warm areas, draws, boxes, folded blankets, on the floor and mother at last had some peace. She found a secure place to hide, on the window sill, behind the open cage door and the curtain. She still crept into the cage occasionally and the kittens were still allowed the odd drink.

Once the kittens were seven weeks old, Cleo had taken to stretching out on the window sill, lying firmly on her stomach. If the kittens tried to push into her teats to have a drink, they were unceremoniously dumped off the window sill onto the floor. It was time for Cleo to move on. To make sure both Cleo and her kittens had the best chance for a future, several measures were vital. Cleo was the product of several generations of feral cats. There was absolutely no chance of her ever being rehomed. The solution needed to be tailored for Cleo. No more kittens would free her from the continual cycle of life and death.

Of having to leave her kittens vulnerable for any predator to kill while she was away looking for food to produce the milk they needed. She would never choose to live somewhere she had to scrounge for food, have to negotiate cars and people and not be able to sleep safely. She would choose to go home to where she used to live.

After another three days of watching Cleo dump her kittens off the window sill, making sure the right time to free her had arrived, I contacted the secretary of the furniture factory. The workers were prepared to leave

food out for her so with their permission arrangements for Cleo's release were made. She had been spayed, wormed, treated for fleas and vaccinated.

With great difficulty, as Cleo was very resistant to handling, she was slid into a secure holding cage and set down on the back seat of my son's car. At dusk we pulled up outside the furniture factory and I lifted the cage with Cleo inside and walked to the twelve foot fence surrounding the property. A two foot gap under the fence made releasing Cleo uncomplicated. I opened the top of the cage. Cleo hunched down and peered around her. I tipped the cage forward toward the back of the building. She sat up, had a quick look, and daintily jumped out of the cage then without haste wriggled underneath the bottom of the fence. Her head came up, what was left of her tail straightened, her back arched and she trotted around the end of the building she obviously recognised. She was free to live her life however she wanted without the constant burden of litter after litter of kittens.

When I returned to the car the Bee Gees were singing "How do you mend a broken heart?" Of course I had a huge lump in my throat and more than one tear in my eyes. My son said "let's go to Sumner and get an ice cream." No ice cream ever tasted as good as that one. It helped fill the emotional void following the release of the tough little feral cat I had named Cleo.

Her kittens were still in my care. For four more weeks Cleo's family grew.

Each fortnight until kittens are twelve weeks old, they are treated for worms and fleas. I use Canex for de-worming. It is a paste and easily administered orally. When de-

fleeing, the fur on the back of their head between their ears has to be parted into a line so the skin is visible. The required liquid dose of Frontline plus is squeezed along the bare skin of the part line.

At twelve weeks of age, kittens are due for their first vaccine. Vaccines given earlier than twelve weeks do not offer the same level of protection for the kitten. Having said that, some veterinarians advise vaccinations begin at six weeks. The choice of how many vaccinations and how often is for the cat owner in consultation with their veterinarian, to decide.

Three days before their first vaccinations were due an animal friendly woman and mother of two children, a boy of nine and a girl of seven, expressed interest in the kittens. The children wanted one each. They lived on a small block in Rolleston. They chose the ginger boy and the calico tortie girl. Cleo would approve, I'm sure.

The next day a lady arrived to view the remaining three. As she walked in the cattery door where the kittens were playing, Mr Five spied her. He rushed up to her legs and tried to climb up to her face. She picked him up and immediately fell in love with him. He had chosen her as his new slave.

The remaining kittens were moved on to the re-homing cattery. Sometimes kittens are not chosen. Their colour, what sex they are, whether they are long or short hair are common don't wants. Cleo's two tabby girls were inseparable but no one wanted them. The two wee girls spent two months playing and sleeping in the sun while they waited for their special human. They now live

together with a family, including the quiet teenage girl who chose them. Their re-homing the final event marking the successful completion of many months of human intervention on behalf of Cleo and her family who would otherwise have had a very different life.

Another cat who would do well returned to her usual stomping ground, once she had raised her kittens and was de-sexed was Meg. She was, a very small, tortoiseshell girl who appeared at dusk scavenging for food. She visited three houses. All the occupants were neighbours and friendly with each other. Each house owner had seen the wee cat but no one could approach her without her bolting over the nearest fence. As Meg became more visibly pregnant, the three caring neighbours became increasingly concerned for her welfare. Jumping over fences to escape human intervention became impossible for Meg so food was left out at ground level for her to consume. Meg gave birth to four kittens in the middle of a huge toi-toi growing on the property of one of the neighbours.

Yet a fourth neighbour, who noticed the kittens were alone, became involved. Meg had left her new kittens asleep and safely hidden, she thought, to go in search of food. The kittens were collected by the fourth neighbour, taken into her kitchen, set down on the floor and a saucer of milk provided for them to drink. She thought Meg had abandoned her kittens and knew they would need food. Kittens as young as Meg's are incapable of surviving from a saucer filled with any liquid or solid food. They need their mother.

Meg arrived back to feed her kittens and found them

gone. She became distressed which in turn caused the three neighbours who cared for Meg to become upset. They went door to door until the kittens were located. The neighbours wanted to do their best for Meg so rang for advice. A trapping cage was loaned to them. They were to put the kittens in the cage and place the cage back in the toi-toi bush. Meg went to her kittens, the trap was sprung and the wee family was taken for a veterinarian check then to a CPL volunteer, who happened to be my daughter, Charon.

My daughter settled Meg and her family into the spare bedroom of her house. Meg was untouchable. Luckily she was an excellent mother. She made sure her kittens were well fed and washed.

The moment any human touched the handle of the door to my daughter's spare room, Meg hid. An arm chair was against the wall of the room in which she lived. The padded arm fitted neatly underneath the end of the writing desk. The arm of the chair became Meg's sanctuary. From it she could watch over her babies snuggled below in a basket filled with snow fleece blankets. For seven weeks Meg was wary but content to mark time and look after her babies. The group of neighbours who had cared for her visited regularly. Meg tolerated them. At each visit they told my daughter, "when she is ready, she is coming back with us." Meg's future was never in doubt.

When she had had enough of her boisterous family, and after she had been spayed, the group of neighbours, collected her. Hopefully she would choose to continue to visit each household at dusk, eating her fill and living her life uncontrolled by humans. Her part of the bargain

would be to keep away the mice and other cats.

Kittens born to feral cats need to be socialised as early as possible if re-homing is to be successful. A pest controller was contacted to trap a brown tabby boy, about five months old, scavenging around the perimeter of the United Fisheries in Woolston. The wee boy was easily trapped. The pest controller had a heart and couldn't destroy the friendly little kitten. He took him to the veterinary practice in New Brighton. The veterinary nurse contacted me and Jasper, the name I later gave him, spent ten weeks in my care, while he waited for a special human to give him an address of his own.

If kittens are more than a few weeks old a better option is to de-sex, de-flea, de-worm, vaccinate and return them to where they were found. Often the best option is not possible. A kind member of the public had been feeding three needy twelve week old kittens underneath the Lyttleton Arts Centre. Another member of the public accused these same kittens of chasing, catching and eating the seagulls. An interesting accusation.

Feral kittens hide during the day and hunt for food at night. Seagulls sleep at night and fly during the day. A pest controller was contracted to remove the kittens. They were successfully trapped and delivered by the pest controller, to the veterinarian in New Brighton who contacted me. The pest controller's request was to "at least give them a chance."

The kittens were terrified. I set the large cage up in my cattery and slid them into it. Ten other cats lived in the cattery. The kittens were inspected by each resident. The first priority was to give the newcomers names. I called

the ginger boy Jack, and the black boy Jiminy. The wee tortoiseshell girl with the light fudge coloured face and white paws, was named Jinx. The three J's had arrived.

Jack was the most forward of the three. The day following their arrival he wolfed down his breakfast and as neither of his siblings appeared to want food, he ate theirs as well. They were all in poor condition so needed to be offered kitten food four times a day. Both Jiminy and Jinx hid behind Jack in the corner of the cage. Two days later and all three were eating their meals. Jack would approach the cage door at meal times but his two siblings huddled in the corner. When I was out of sight they would slink up to Jack. Jiminy would hide between him and the side of the cage while Jinx crawled underneath her big ginger brother, gulp a mouthful and slink back into her corner.

The process involved in socialising very timid kittens is a long one. Jack was the protector of Jinx and his brother Jiminy. Even though they were all eating, Jinx's behavior was the most concerning. She would slink out of their sleeping box, crawl along the bottom of the cage and squeeze between her two brothers, bolt down some food and scurry back to her corner in the dark. She never took her eyes off me. She was a seriously suspicious kitten.

Even though a litter tray was provided, all three kittens wee'd and poo'd in their bed, in their drink bowl, all over the cage floor and even in their food plate.

The three of them had to learn to use their litter tray.

Jack grew very quickly. Over the following four weeks he continued to protect his brother and sister. They were let

out of their large cage into a two metre high three metre long and two and a half metre wide enclosed section of the cattery. Jack slowly moved away from his siblings and was integrated into the main cattery where he began to sleep and play with the other residents. Slowly Jiminy ventured away from their covered sleeping box. Not Jinx. She still huddled out of sight in their bed, in the darkest corner of the cattery.

Six weeks passed. Jinx still slunk along the floor, grabbed food when no one was watching, slunk back into the safety of her box and shivered in terror if approached. As they grew, one meal a day was removed and meal times were morning, evening and cat biscuits for supper. Jiminy began to explore the cattery and make friends with the residents. Jinx continued to huddle, hide and shake.

At week ten in my care, Jinx realised she was safe and no one was going to hurt her. She still hid on her own. Her defensive behavior had been to hiss and spit, and rake my wrists with her hind claws, if I attempted to lift her out of her box. Slowly her attacks became less regular and she only showed her fear by ducking and backing away. She found her place, on top of the door frame, and made no complaint when tickled under her chin or scratched behind her ears. She still watched any movement made by anyone. She began to wait for her meals, having learned when they were due and she meowed her pleasure at their appearance.

Jack was de-sexed when he was five months old. Five months later he was settled into the re-homing cattery to wait for a special human to give him a permanent

address. Jiminy and Jinx will be de-sexed as soon as they are able to be handled without them clawing the human hands that will have to hold them. Jiminy will probably develop into a human loving, sociable boy in time. Jinx may never want any home other than the one she has with me.

Her socialisation will continue for some time yet. How much human involvement she will finally accept remains to be seen. At least Jinx has regained her condition and though still small, is steadily growing. Nothing can replace the satisfaction of seeing such a terrified, almost dead, fourteen week old kitten developing into an adult, unsociable though she may be.

Jack spent six months living in the teens re-homing cattery, The Palace. He hid, scuttled out for each meal then hid until the next meal was offered. He would never be chosen by any one, he was never visible to be chosen. He was returned to me. Jinx and Jiminy were overjoyed to see their brother again. So much for cats having no memory. Jack's behavior had not changed. He had been sociable when he left and only days after his return he was accepting stroking and back scratching as if he had never been absent. Clearly the three siblings are totally dependent on each other.

After eighteen months, Jinx still burrows underneath coverings on chairs or in boxes expecting me to find her and slide her breakfast under the covers for her to eat. Jack and Jiminy are sometimes visible during the day. They enjoy the quiet and the sunshine that streams into the cattery through the wire netting walls. Jinx is only ever seen late each evening. All are de-sexed. Not one of these three beautiful feral cats will ever be a pet. Their

mother unfortunately, was never caught. She may still be alive and reproducing. At least the three J's have been released from this burden.

Any building that is warm, dry and has a ready food source is an ideal place for feral cats to set up home. How the cats are treated will dictate whether or not the colony will grow out of control or remain manageable, perhaps beneficial. A feral colony of about a dozen cats was living on an industrial site in Woolston. All but three were trapped and killed. One black and white mother and her two boys, a tabby and a black, having been trapped, were delivered into my care. The mother had been named Iris. Her son, the black boy, was named Willy and the beautiful tabby boy, also her son was called Hugo. On arrival they acted much like the three J's. Weeks later their behaviour continued to mark them as feral. Together they are six cats who will never be homed.

When the time is right for the six "untouchables", they will be let out of the cattery and allowed to roam as they choose. The cattery door will be left open during the daytime and closed at night. There is no difficulty getting them in at night as a cat door allows them to enter but not to exit the cattery. Their food will be left in the cattery for them each night. When they enter through the open door or the cat door, they will be unable to leave again until after their breakfast in the morning. Currently they are not showing any signs of wanting to be let out. All six are healthy and happy, they are welcome to reside with me.

The tragedy is that both the Arts Centre and I.R.S. properties are now vacant. A vacant lot is an open

invitation for the development of another feral colony. If both organisations had de-sexed the colony and allowed them to live in peace, the colony numbers would have dwindled naturally. There would have been no place for other non-altered and dumped cats. Mice would also have been kept to a minimum. With no cats now in residence, the old adage "when the cat's away the mice will play," will no doubt prove correct.

As city limits expand into open areas inhabited by dumped cats which have become feral, they are forced to seek out new food sources. Houses on the edge of vacant ground, factories, schools and parks, are all likely places to be colonised. Organisations that find themselves with a feral cat colony on their doorstep need to be financially supported, as part of a Trap Alter Release program, to achieve a long term solution. The philosophy of cat control needs to move from the short term and short sighted, "trap and kill" to the sustainable long term "trap, de-sex and return." Humane cat control through trap, alter, release programs provide a sustainable solution. Every City Council needs to be proactive in offering assistance.

CHAPTER 4

FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS AND FELINE LEUKEMIA VIRUS

Pipkin, Zeppelin, Paddles, Brierly

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) and Feline Leukemia, (FeLV). are deadly but preventable diseases. They are increasing at an alarming rate. A mother cat infected with the Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) may pass it to her kittens during gestation or when feeding them. FeLV is transmitted predominately through infected saliva. Not through aggressive behavior but through social activities such as nose to nose contact, sharing food and mutual grooming. Other body fluids such as blood, urine, faeces and milk may also transmit the disease.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) is mainly transmitted through blood to blood contact. Casual contact with an infected cat is unlikely to spread the disease. Most often the cats infected with FIV are un de-sexed, uncontrolled free roaming males. These cats fight each other for their place in feral colonies and for the right to mate. Biting, causing injury and therefore blood, is the most effective way for the virus to be transmitted.

FIV is the cat equivalent of HIV in humans. They are specific to each species and not transferable. The last stage of FIV is known as Feline Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). The cat's immune system is eventually over powered after being infected for many years. Rarely does a cat infected by FIV/AIDS

live a long life. They can with treatment and careful care from their owner, enjoy the time they have. Cats infected early, have a life expectancy of six to eight years.

A drug called Interferon can help the immune system fight infections in cats. Veterinarians are able to prescribe Interferon which slows the progress of the infection and improves the quality of life for an FIV/AIDS cat. Usually the daily dose worked out by the veterinarian is given every alternate week for that week. The veterinarian decides how long the two week about cycle will be continued based on the cat's response to treatment. The medication is syringed down the cat's throat.

As the virus progresses, any other infection the cat might get will take longer to resolve. Vigilance by the cat's owner and early intervention will prevent infections escalating out of control. For instance, if the cat has been fighting, it is likely a bite will become infected. The veterinarian will prescribe a short course of a broad spectrum antibiotic such as Clavulox, which may prevent more serious consequences. An FIV/AIDS cat is more vulnerable to infection so a longer ten day course might be needed.

My first experience with an FIV/AIDS cat was Pipkin. I was walking along the street where I live, writing a grocery list in my head. Weaving and falling across the road towards me was a very small, emaciated tabby cat. The cat fell exhausted at my feet. I picked it up and carried it home. An emergency call for help was made to my veterinarian and Pipkin, was rushed in to the clinic. Her age was put at six years, she was in renal failure. A blood sample was taken and she tested positive for FIV.

She was dying. Nothing I could do would help her. She was desperately dehydrated. Over the following two days and every two hours, water and very watery food was syringed down her throat. She rallied slightly. For ten days she had company, food, water and cuddles. She died on my bed, beside me four days later.

My next encounter with FIV/AIDS was Zeppelin. He had an owner. Concerned neighbours watched as the neglected red brown tabby boy slowly lost weight and all his condition. Unsuccessfully, they implored Zeppelin's owners to take the cat to a veterinarian. One morning Zeppelin staggered down the road and collapsed.

The neighbours scooped the very sick cat up off the road, wrapped him in a towel and delivered him to me. He was settled into a cage with a hot water bottle to warm his frozen, emaciated body and given a drink of water. I provided him with a small serving of tinned cat food mixed with warm water to help him digest his meal, warm blankets to lie on and, for his convenience, a litter tray. When he was settled comfortably his condition could be assessed. This desperate cat was unable to stand unaided. His haunches were protruding bone, barely covered with fur which was sticky and stood up in tufts. He was riddled with worms, infested with fleas and had a large, very deep, weeping sore on his back paw. The first priority was to make Zeppelin as comfortable as possible while he recovered. He was given a worm pill, and was de-fleaed. The veterinarian also prescribed antibiotics, Clavulox, for his painfully infected paw. A blood test was suggested, and the results confirmed Zeppelin was infected with FIV and now had Feline AIDS.

One month later, after several courses of antibiotics his paw had healed and Zeppelin was fit enough to be neutered. Regular food, rest and much attention bought out his sociable and affectionate nature. Alas, because of his illness he would never find a new owner. He was three years old. His life expectancy was only another three to five years.

Over the next two years Zeppelin's health improved. He began to assert himself around the house. Bitter fights, mainly with Geos (Chapter Two), the feral cat who had been in residence for several years, were regular events. Ongoing wounds, the direct result of his many fights, were taking longer and longer to heal. Septicemia and respiratory infections were common. It seemed like he was forever going to the veterinarian. He always recovered even if slowly. Then towards the end of the first two years he contracted hepatitis. The veterinarian offered two options. One was to put him down, the other was to connect him to a fluid drip for two to three days to try and flush the toxins from his body via his kidneys. There was no guarantee the treatment would work. Sociable, lovable and dependant Zeppelin was once again, fighting for his life. A drip was attached and Zeppelin spent another three days in the vet's hospital. Then, with no visible improvement I took Zeppelin home. His death appeared imminent but I could not give up on him. I placed small tempting morsels of food in front of him. I also had liquid Metacam, an anti-inflammatory cat and dog pain relief medication, Clavulox, the broad spectrum antibiotic and Phenobarbitone, a sedative, which Zeppelin had been prescribed, for a previous back problem. I gave Zeppelin small doses of pain relief and

sedative medications which kept him comfortable and quiet. Along with the antibiotics he was able to focus his energy on eating, resting and fighting the infection. Amazingly, Zeppelin improved. Three weeks later he crashed again. He had contracted yet another infection. An extended course of good old reliable Clavulox was prescribed.

The veterinarian who had seen Zeppelin suggested Interferon treatment. At the time Interferon was only available from the Public Hospital in adult doses so it had to be precisely diluted. Its use in animals was a very new idea. The first week brought almost no change, though Zeppelin did show slight signs of increased energy. One day into the first week without Interferon and Zeppelin was already becoming inactive. His back was hunched, his head drooped and his ears were flat.

Week three, back on Interferon. His energy level began to increase by day three. The fourth week, no Interferon. His energy level began to decrease by day four. After three months of alternating one week with Interferon and one week without, Zeppelin's life returned to "cat" normal. His ears stood up straight, he hid in an enclosed cupboard in the hall and jumped out at which ever unsuspecting cat passed his hiding place. He just had fun. He never let me out of his sight. Zeppelin enjoyed every minute of his new found health. He still contracted infections and was a regular visitor to the veterinarian but antibiotics resolved most problems. Interferon had given him a life he hadn't been able to enjoy. Sadly, three and a half years after Zeppelin's arrival he slipped into a decline from which he would never recover. He had had six and a half years of life, three and a half of those years

in my care.

If he had been de-sexed when he was three months of age and kept in at night he may never have come in contact with an FIV positive cat and may never have been infected with FIV/AIDS.

A veterinarian once told me that the fences around my property must have notices pinned to them which said "all sick and homeless cats welcome here." I wonder if cats know instinctively where to go for help and which humans they can trust to care for them.

A medium haired black and white cat began appearing on the cattery roof each night at dusk. The cat was very thin and was too large to be a female. At the first sign of any human approach he would flee and hide. Food was put on the cattery roof. The cat would slink from his hiding place and gulp the food all the while watching for humans. He would then disappear until the next night. Each night I would slide the food closer to the edge of the roof then eventually, I put it on the grass where he could see it. The cat had enormous white feet so he was named Paddles. His food was offered each evening closer and closer to the house. Paddles sneaked to his food. He had realised food was also available each morning. He was also becoming more tolerant of me and my son, Tony.

Four months after his first appearance, Tony grabbed him very firmly behind his front legs, while pressing down on his neck with his other hand. Paddles was urgently in need of antibiotics. Both of his eyes were weeping blood and he had a dry, scaly sore that covered most of his

nose. The condition of his coat had improved with the availability of regular food though large patches of his skin were bare. He was de-wormed and de-fleaed. A long course of anti-biotics and eye drops were prescribed and a blood test was carried out. Paddles, like Pipkin and Zeppelin before him, was FIV positive.

Once his condition improved and while still receiving antibiotics to prevent further infection, Paddles was de-sexed. This sociable, friendly cat neither bites nor scratches. He voices his disapproval by a low, short, quiet growl. He would have to live his life, however long it would be, in my care because no human would knowingly home a cat with FIV/AIDS.

Often the time to make the final decision to end a cat's life can be as confusing as it is devastating. Paddles had taken to spending his afternoons underneath the maple tree in the middle of the front lawn. For several weeks he comfortably stretched out in its shade. He had always been a very obedient cat, arriving from wherever he had been relaxing when called. I noticed he seemed to sleep more often and for longer in the front yard but still came when called for meals. His eyes still watered. They had always watered but still there was something not quite right with Paddles. Alarm bells rang when his behavior changed and he began to drink more and more water.

He would pat his front paws into the drink bowl and splash in the water. He would have a very long drink, disappear for hours, then would return and repeat the process. That behavior was definitely unusual for him. A blood sample revealed the worst possible diagnosis.

Paddles was in renal failure. He was also found to have a heart murmur, his liver was not functioning and he had an abscess. He was dying.

Did I ask the veterinarian to put him down or did I take him home, keep him out of pain and comfortable until he made his own time to die? I chose to take Paddles home. Metacam would keep him pain free and constant care would keep him comfortable. Daily, his appetite diminished. Nine days later, after half a Periactin tablet, an appetite stimulant, Paddles ate a complete tin of a special diet packed full of vitamins. The next day and each day following, he refused to eat on his own but tolerated some special kidney diet food fed to him through a syringe.

Meanwhile his wound, where the abscess had been cleaned out had split open and was gushing pus. His wound began to heal with warm salt water washes followed by a second wash with Otoderm. Twelve days after his diagnosis, he took a turn for the worse. He could not hold down food. He struggled off the bed where he had been comfortable and crawled under the bed. He was saying "I've had enough. Just leave me be."

It was time for him to go. He made neither sound nor movement as he lay on the veterinarian's table for the last time. He'd lived his life according to his rules and he'd chosen his time to die. Paddle's was only six years old. He was buried beside Zeppelin. Because of some human's refusal to de-sex their cats, these two lovely boys were deprived of ten years of their lives.

FIV/AIDS is only one of the largely preventable

conditions that cats are dying from. FeLV passed from an infected mother to her kittens through her milk or saliva, is also eventually fatal.

Sitting on my fence one cold, wet and windy afternoon, crying piteously and loudly was a black and white kitten. He was shaking uncontrollably and was soaking wet. I wrapped him in a towel, dried him, then covered him in a soft blanket for warmth. For two hours he shook, shivered and cried. When he was finally calm I settled him into a cage with dry bedding, food, drink, his toilet and a hottie. He appeared to be no more than ten weeks of age.

The first night in the cage the frightened wee boy sat looking through the wire door of his sanctuary waiting, watching and fearful of what might happen next. After his breakfast the following day he was de-wormed with a quarter of an Endogard tablet and de-flead with a squirt off Frontline plus. The veterinarian found the wee boy to be undernourished. He had an upper respiratory tract infection. The fleas continued to jump off his wee body during the examination. His second teeth were beginning to come through which made him, not ten weeks but about five months old.

He needed antibiotics and would be vaccinated after the course ended two weeks later. After much consideration, a suitable name was chosen for him. He would be known as Brierly.

Brierly developed into a delightful, happy, contented and obedient cat.

My elderly seventeen year old black and white boy, named Sparky, took over the role of teaching Brierly the

rules of the house. Sparky had been a rescued cat himself. Mac, another son, had been visiting friends in Timaru one weekend. Family relations where he was staying were heated and the most vulnerable weapon was a six week old kitten. It was thrown along the lino floor, skidding into the fridge at the end of the kitchen. It would try to get its balance by clawing at the lino in front of the fridge while it was furiously shaking its head from side to side. It would be grabbed and thrown at the partner. She would duck and the hapless kitten would hit the wall and fall to the ground dazed. Mac became more and more anxious for the kittens survival so threatened "if you mistreat that kitten again I'm taking him home to Mum." Later that day Mac headed back to Christchurch with the kitten in tow.

An examination when the poor wee thing arrived revealed two breaks in his tail, several quite large raised bruises in his head and some grazes on his shoulder and neck. It happened that my third son, Geoff, was celebrating his twenty first birthday and had just qualified as an electrician so in keeping with the reason for festivities, the wee kitten was given the name Sparky. Sparky's injuries healed quickly though forever he would have a tail broken in two places. I digress.

Sparky would march up to where Brierly sat, sniff him all over then proceeded to wash poor Brierly, from head to toe. Sparky held his charge flat on the floor and washed a wriggling Brierly who soon realised that if he stayed still, the washing would quickly cease. If Brierly decided to poke Sparky with his paw, Sparky would give Brierly a good clip across his ears and Brierly would quickly submit to Sparky's ministrations.

When Brierly was nine months of age he developed Chlamydia. His eyes oozed pus, his nose ran and his breathing passages clogged which made his breathing very difficult. Sparky, now eighteen years old, and still washing his charge became infected. Chlamydia is often fatal and though Brierly was young and less at risk, fingers, were crossed for Sparky's recovery.

Sparky, as well as being elderly, had had a heart murmur diagnosed eight years previously. In the end they both recovered. Sparky took longer and needed extra care. He was fed watered down baby food mixture through a syringe so he didn't dehydrate. Once he returned to his old self, Sparky decided Brierly was too much trouble. Brierly was on his own. Brierly, now in his teens, most likely breathed a sigh of relief.

Brierly searched for another washer. He decided that Pixel, (Chapter Two), only a few months older than himself, was the next best washer. Pixel refused to baby Brierly but as they sorted out their roles they became devoted friends. They slept together in the same chair. They laid facing each other on the warm concrete drive and they shared their meals.

For the following two and a half years, Brierly continued to grow in size though not in maturity. He would arrive on any one of the several fences surrounding my property whenever he was called and meow loudly and persistently to announce his arrival. Daily when I cleaned the litter trays, Brierly would chase the water gushing from the hose nozzle. After all the litter trays had been cleaned, I swirled the hose around in a semi-circle then

back again. Brierly would try and catch the water, becoming very wet in the process. He trotted everywhere. Walking was not fast enough for him. He would rush inside for his meals, eat half from his own plate then he and Pixel would change plates. After gobbling up the remaining food, off he would trot with Pixel walking sedately behind him, to plan their day.

The first sign of trouble was the appearance of Brierly's third eye, a white thick film that spread out from the nose end of his eyes. Instead of chasing the hose, he lay on the grass and looked at the water. From eating everything on his and Pixel's plate every day, he began to pick at the edge of his plate. He made no attempt to swap with Pixel so she finished her own meal.

A course of antibiotics made absolutely no difference. For two months Brierly neither improved nor did his condition worsen. A blood test was carried out and Brierly, the friendly, sociable, cuddly boy was diagnosed with Feline Leukemia. He was three years and four months old. Most cats born to a mother with Leukemia have approximately four years to live. Brierly's life was slowly slipping away.

Within weeks, Brierly ceased eating. He was given baby food by syringe four times a day. Four days later, this very sick boy crawled underneath my bed. He refused to let me give him food. He wanted to be left alone in the dark, under the bed. The heart wrenching decision was made to put him down. No cat owner or veterinarian enjoys ending an animal's life but animal euthanasia does provide a real and humane choice to end an

animals suffering. No matter how many times a cat owner has to make the ultimate decision, it never gets any easier.

I learned later that Brierly's mother, had had several litters of kittens. Only two kittens from all the litters, had survived, Brierly and his look alike brother. By the time Brierly was three years old, his mother and her only other surviving kitten had died. Brierly's mother would most likely have become infected by the un-de-sexed male who fathered her many kittens through those casual social behaviors such nose to nose contact, which precedes mating.

One way to control the spread of Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) and Feline Leukemia, (FeLV), is to de-sex all kittens, both male and female, at four months of age, or when they weigh one kilo. Additionally, a sustainable program advocating the Trap Alter and Release of cats must be a part of every City Councils platform.

CHAPTER FIVE

STRAY AND EXPENDABLE.

Mitzi, Nugget, Alex, Butch, Gracie, Willie, Billy, Dave, Tulley, Mimsie and the rest

All cats without a human owner or address are considered stray and therefore expendable. All stray cats originally had owners. Excuses that cat owners make to justify the dumping of their pets are cruel, flippant, often lies and always selfish. No praise can be too great for those caring citizens who rescue stray cats, often giving up hours of their time to gain the cat's confidence, securing the cat and delivering it to a safe place for on going care and re-homing. Their dedication and compassion for animals is heart warming.

Mitzi can't have been an easy cat to rescue. Her rescuers, simply anonymous caring people, captured Mitzi and her three kittens and delivered them to the CPL. From there she and her family were placed with a volunteer. Mitzi's coat shone silver. There were dark grey stripes down her head, between her ears and along her tail. Patches of different shades of apricot appear to have been flicked along her back and sides. Her paws are more peach than apricot and she has a white chest. Her eyes are the shape and colour of almonds. She is truly beautiful and she knows it.

Mitzi was three years old when she was rescued. At the time of her rescue, Mitzi's kittens were newly born. She had no choice but to stay where she had been discovered, protect her babies and suffer the fright of

being captured. When the kittens were several weeks old one kitten disappeared. Although a thorough search of the volunteer's property was carried out, the kitten was never found. When the two remaining kittens were old enough, about eight weeks of age, they were found homes and Mitzi was spayed. Two months later, Mitzi was found a new home. Her new owners liked the look of her but could not manage her strange, secretive and reclusive behavior.

Mitzi was placed in the care of the SPCA. She was rehomed and returned twice more to the SPCA. Time was running out for Mitzi. Coincidentally a drama was unfolding in the community. Mitzi had a double. It so happened that her double, an eight year old cat called Navara had had a slight stroke. Two weeks later, she had another stroke which left her with the use of only one leg. Navara would not recover so the agonising decision was made by her owners to put her down. The following day, Navara's owners visited the SPCA to select another cat. It had to be a Navara "look alike." Mitzi was chosen, paid for and taken home to live with her fourth new owner in five months.

Mitzi hid under the bed, in dark cupboards or anywhere that was quiet. Her new owners were less than pleased with her behavior. They hauled the cat out from its hiding place to show a visitor, who just happened to be my son, Tony. The scared cat escaped the owner's arms and pushed herself into a tiny space between the top of the microwave and the bottom of a cupboard. Tony quietly told Mitzi she was beautiful. She stared unblinkingly at the human with the quiet voice. Struggling out of her hiding place, she jumped onto his lap, crawled inside his jacket and hid. When Tony left for home, Mitzi was

carefully removed from the inside of his jacket and lowered to the floor. She bolted up the hall and under the bed in the dark, too frightened to venture out even for her food.

The following morning Tony had a phone call from Mitzi's owners. They had had enough of this "mad, stupid cat." Tony took a cat cage and went to Mitzi's rescue. After a cat dies, owners need to give themselves time to grieve. A look a like cat is not a carbon copy of the cat that died. Good grief takes time.

On arrival she was settled in the large cage in my spare room. I visited with Mitzi several times a day, always talking quietly and lightly stroking her, slowly gaining her trust. When she was released out of the cage and into the spare room, she wedged herself between the scrim covering the underneath of the bed and the wooden struts above the scrim. The hole she had squeezed through was tiny.

The base of the bed was the only place Mitzi could find to hide so the scrim covering the underside of the bed was removed. Mitzi had no place to hide. She now had to learn to cope with her surroundings. One month later, Mitzi was allowed the run of the house at night. Each morning Mitzi was returned to her room before the outside doors were opened. Each night when the house was quiet Mitzi would slip between the sheets on my bed, crawl to the bottom and sleep. After another month of constant attention Mitzi was let outside the house. She spent the next two months keeping the back door within sight. Her security was the open door. She knew she could bolt inside and hide if she felt threatened. For most of the day she lay on the roof of the sun porch, ironically,

over where the noise and daily action took place. She climbed down to the ground each evening for her tea.

There are rules in my cat household. The main rule of the house is that all cats living with me will stay inside the house at night. The first year Mitzi lived with me she learnt all the rules. Breakfast at eight, dinner at five and curfew is at nine in the summer and six in the winter. She broke the curfew several times arriving back from her wanderings very late and twice stayed out all night. After four years in residence Mitzi developed into a haughty madame who turns to mush for a scratch of her tummy and a back rub. She wouldn't dream of staying outside at night, she likes her comfort too much.

Mitzi was three years old when she was first rescued. I can only guess at the neglect and abuse she had suffered prior to rescue. Most stray cats are not as terrified of humans as she was. While it is common for a cat when rescued to hide somewhere dark and not eat for forty-eight hours, nearly all need only a few days of regular meals and kindness to develop into friendly mates.

Cats can become strays because their owners are in trouble. Tenants at a Wainoni address had done a midnight flit. The landlord discovered the empty flat when he visited to enquire as to why the rent had not been paid.

He was greeted by an empty house, doors wide open and two very hungry cats.

He locked up the flat, bought cat food from the nearby shop, fed the cats outside and called the CPL leaving a description of the two six year old boys. I arrived at the

address with two secure cages ready to collect the cats.

Three cats sat in the entrance of a driveway adjacent to the address I had been given. Two were black. I was looking for one black and one tabby. Which black cat had been abandoned? I didn't want to rescue someone's pet. I stood by the gate of the address the landlord had given and called the cats. The two answering to the description, came running. The second black cat just sat where he was and watched. The two six year old boys were later named Nugget and Alex. Nugget was a short haired black and Alex a silver tabby with white markings. Once home I settled them into the large cage together. Nugget remained safely at the back of the cage, Alex was more adventurous. When Nugget and Alex were rescued, Nugget needed two days to adjust to captivity but Alex immediately settled in and ate his meal. Since Nugget didn't want his, Alex ate the second plate full as well.

Nugget was quieter than his in your face mate Alex. They had obviously lived their life together. Nugget was quite dependant on Alex. He was always a pace behind his tabby mate. They were friendly and affectionate, proof that someone had loved them, talked to them and cared for them. Nugget and Alex now have a new, permanent home together.

Cats need not be stray to be expendable. Two eleven month old male cats lived with a couple who had just had their first baby. Mother in law repeated an old story about a baby being smothered by a cat. She told the young parents that the two resident cats should be removed to prevent her grandchild from suffering the same fate.

Their owners could not afford the cost of putting the two unfortunate cats down so rang the CPL. Once treated for worms, fleas, de-sexed and vaccinated the two cats were quickly re-homed.

A completely opposite decision was made by a mother of fifteen month old triplets. A cream tortoiseshell cat, turned up hungry and very thin at the front door of the flat in Aranui where the family lived. The lady of the house fed the cat and as the cat became stronger it ventured inside the flat making friends with the three wee boys. It neither scratched nor bit when its tail was pulled or its ears were grabbed by three pairs of tiny fingers. The triplet's busy mother accepted the cat as the family's live in pet and therefore her responsibility. Aware that all tortoiseshell cats were female, she contacted the CPL for help towards the cost of spaying, vaccinating and transporting the cat to and from the procedures. I provided transport for the cat to the veterinarian for her operation then late afternoon collected the cat and delivered her back to her owner. Ten days later when the cat's stitches needed to be removed, the same procedure was repeated.

Shortly after the cat had been spayed, the family moved. The cat went with them. The cat was locked in at the new address. Somehow a door was inadvertently left open. The very busy, distraught owner rang me sure she would never see the cat again. "Don't worry yet, often cats need no time to settle into new surroundings," I told her. I crossed my fingers hoping the families pet was one of the few who settled anywhere. Sure enough, two nights later a noisy, hungry cat arrived on the back doorstep of its new address, demanding food. A very relieved owner

could hardly wait to pass on to me the cat's reappearance.

Most cats need at least a week to investigate their new homes. Unfortunately, some who have been released too soon, do flee never to return. Sometimes even the cat who has a loving owner who does all the right things, finds to their sorrow that the cat continues to return to the families old address. Without a new human to care for the cat, it becomes a stray.

Butch turned up at the end of my patio each night when I called my cats for their tea. He sat and waited for me to provide his meal. Abruptly he disappeared for several weeks then reappeared in the same place, at tea time.

Three times he repeated the process. His owner had moved and took Butch and his brother to live at their new address. Butch kept returning to his old address, a nearby flat. My neighbour offered to "look after Butch forever." Butch's journey from his new address meant him crossing a very busy road and risk being hit by a car. His old owners agreed that it would be in Butch's best interests to stay with my neighbour. Butch is a very loving, friendly companion who visits the many cats living with me whenever he needs the company of other cats.

Sometimes a stray cat will adopt a family. Gracie did. When she found herself without an owner, Gracie needed to find somewhere safe to sleep. She chose a suitable house and slept underneath it. The house was one of many that backed on to the Linwood Intermediate sports ground. Gracie could saunter along the back sections, sneak into back yards and help herself to food left out for owned cats. She could also search the

schools rubbish bins for leftover children's lunches. Nightly she would return to her safe sleeping place underneath her chosen house. When the occupants of Gracie's address realised a cat was living beneath their floor they began feeding her. Gracie ventured onto the verandah where the children played and chose a comfortable chair for her day time nap. She continued to squeeze through the vent and underneath the house to spend her nights. Gracie would have liked to live with her chosen family but the occupant did not want a cat. Gracie had to move on.

I collected her and she stayed with me for four months until room was available in the re-homing cattery. After twelve months of living in the cattery with absolutely no human interested enough to even stroke her, the large, black and white, loveable Gracie now lives with me. She is friendly, loves her food and everyone else's, kisses those she likes and doesn't demand anything from anyone. A more perfect cat would be impossible to find. Often all a cat needs is a chance to love.

Another cat who just needed a chance to love was Motley, a brindle tortoiseshell.

Like all the cats who have come into my care over the years, she too was in a very poor condition. In all probability she would have aborted the kittens she was too weak to carry. For the first seven weeks in residence she drank, ate, scurried outside to the toilet then returned inside to sleep. When she woke she began her routine over again. From dire beginnings, she ended up having a very long, healthy, happy life, dying of kidney failure at nineteen and a half.

Some cats find themselves pawns in a human game. Willie, a long haired black boy and his brother Billy, a long haired grey lived under a house in Bishopdale. A neighbour was concerned about them so fed them. She said the house owner refused to feed them. The house owner said the grey cat helped itself from her kitchen bench. The black cat was not welcome. There seemed to be other issues between the house owner and neighbour. Let's not go there.

While these two argued, it became obvious neither wanted the cats, but the neighbour would at least help trap them. Once trapped, the terrified boys were delivered into my care. They were settled together in the holding cage in my spare room. All their needs were provided for, warmth, security, food, drink and a litter tray. They gulped their food then tried to hide between their bed and the side of the cage. Billy always jammed himself into the corner behind Willie. For five days they huddled together only coming out for meals.

After one week in the secure cage, the door was opened and the two boys were allowed out to roam the spare room. Willie slowly began to venture away from Billy who continued to cower in the corner of the cage. Willie discovered the window sill. He could stretch out on it and enjoy the sun streaming through the net covered windows. He was neutered, vaccinated, treated for worms and fleas and quickly became confident and sociable.

Billy didn't progress at all. His third eye appeared after a week. Its appearance often indicates sickness or stress. It remained visible for three months.

Willie continued to move out and about the room. Billy needed his brother closer to him so eventually he left the cage and would crouch beneath the chair where Willie was relaxing. When Willie jumped back into the cage for his meal, Billy scurried ahead of him. They ate together, slept together jumped out of the cage together, Billy always one step behind Willie.

A few weeks later, they were transferred to my large open cattery. Willie slowly began sleeping with the other cats already in the cattery. He formed a friendship with a silver and white tabby boy. The two played chasing games.

They played with the toy mice, rolled in the catnip provided for their entertainment then curled up together. Willie was ready for a new home. When his new owner, a librarian, came for him, I cuddled him, kissed him good-bye and assured him his new owner would read him stories. He "owns" a wonderful human.

Billy didn't appear to miss his brother. He would not allow anyone to pick him up, he ducks rather than cowers, but he is at least approachable. He was stroked and talked to constantly. It took eight months before he was confident enough to be de-sexed and vaccinated. For the first eighteen months in my care he defecated in several places many times a night. He shot out his claws at any attempt to touch him. I persevered approaching him and attempting to stroke him and dodging his sharp, damaging claws. I consoled myself with the knowledge that blood dries up and scratches heal when he did manage to claw my hand. He ate whatever was put in front of him and he always dined in the same place. He slowly began to take an interest in the antics of the

outside cats. Several weeks slipped by before he began to become quite agitated, darting along the floor of the cattery from one end then back to the other. Billy wanted out. By the time the decision was made to allow Billy his freedom, he had been in "custody" for almost two years.

The first day the Cattery door was opened, he tentatively crept out through the open door. He sniffed around the door for several minutes then slowly crept down the path toward the house. After two hours he wanted to return to his safe cattery. Each succeeding day he enjoyed longer hours of freedom returning nightly to eat his tea and sleep. Over the following six months he moved into the house, chummed up with Dave and Mitzi, (Chapter 5) and Scotty (Chapter 11), a young boy left behind when his owner was sent to prison. The scared long haired grey Billy is now six years old. He is obedient, eats well, loves to be stroked and scratched behind his ears and sleeps wherever he chooses, often stretched out on my bed beside me. All it took was time and patience. Unfortunately, most cats as terrified as Billy are euthanised. Not too many humans are prepared to persevere. Cats are numerous and expendable. Death is a quick option if the cat doesn't meet human requirements. A micro chip has been inserted under the skin on his shoulder. On it is recorded Billy's name, address, veterinary records and my phone number. He will never be suitable as a pet so he will live the rest of his life with the growing number of abused and neglected, rescued cats and me. Should he wander away, get lost, trapped as a feral or wild cat or hit by a car, his owner information is available immediately on the microchip.

It is not only the cats that become embroiled in games, but also those who rescue them. One male cat, one very pregnant cat and one cat with three kittens were about to be abandoned by their owner as she moved out of her house. The owner told a neighbour she'd made arrangements for the cats to be collected by the CPL. She hadn't. The neighbour believing the situation was about to be resolved, fed the cats. When no one came to collect them the now angry neighbour rang the CPL. A volunteer went to the address to begin the collection of the cats. The neighbour was told that no contact had been made with CPL. She calmed down and couldn't have been more helpful.

The tenant of the house had left the door open in her haste. The volunteer and the neighbour checked the house for any more abandoned animals. Shut in one room was a female pit-bull terrier cross who had had puppies. They searched the house but could not find them. The neighbour accepted the responsibility for finding a new home for the dog.

She refused to contact the Dog Pound fearing the dog would be put down because of its breed.

Over the following three days and after several visits, the volunteer collected the male cat and the pregnant female. The mother cat and her kittens were living underneath the house and still being fed by the neighbour. The kittens were under the house and not about to venture into the outside world. The neighbour's young son crawled underneath the house and collected the kittens, one by one.

The mother was grabbed when she had scrambled out into the sunshine. The little family was complete. The

volunteer was contacted and the mother and her kittens were removed to a safe place.

The pregnant cat was aborted and spayed. The boy was neutered. When the kittens were weaned, at around five weeks, their mother would be spayed. They were all found new homes.

Rarely, a stray will be discovered after a lengthy absence and returned to its owner. A cat went missing shortly after its owner moved from a house in Shirley to a house in North Brighton. The owner gave a description of the cat to the CPL which was entered into the appropriate book and a lost notice was displayed on the CPL's shop window. Months slipped by without any sighting of the cat so the notice was removed from the window. One year turned into almost two. All was not lost. A very thin cat had appeared in the part of Shirley where a volunteer lived. It was being fed intermittently by several residents in the street. The volunteer thought she recognised the cat from the description she had read months ago. It was certainly very similar but was it the missing cat? The missing cat was white with minor distinctive markings. The cat being fed by several residents was very dirty and was more grey than white, if the grey was white then the markings matched, it just might be the lost cat. Any one who reports a missing cat has their details recorded beside the description of their cat in a book. The volunteer scoured the records.

Even though there were several cats matching the description of the stray, the owner was found. The cat and its owner were overjoyed to be reunited after almost two years of searching for each other.

Cats may become stray for any number of reasons. Not all reasons are malicious. In some instances no reason, only guesses, can be made for why a cat is stray.

Tulley, a Burmese cross two year old arrived from over my six foot fence meowing and expecting dinner. He was given food which he scoffed and back over the fence he went. Next morning he appeared for breakfast. Surprised, I fed him and watched as he jumped the fence and disappeared underneath my neighbour's house. Knowing the neighbour had two, very elderly brindle tortoiseshell girls, and interested that they may have introduced Tulley into their house, I queried Tulley's arrival. The neighbours hadn't noticed Tulley. After three days of arriving for meals, Tulley decided he would sneak into my house. He had to be someone's pet. He was about two years old and had been neutered. He was very sociable and had been taught breakfast is in the morning and dinner is at night. He would sit all day on a chair only vacating it to rush outside to the toilet. I rang the CPL, the SPCA, all the veterinarians in the area, checked the lost and found columns of the local papers in the library and left Tulley's description where I could. No one had lost Tulley. Where had he escaped from?

One possibility was that someone was going overseas or moving and gave him away. The new owner may have been unaware that they would need to keep him inside for at least a week, two weeks is even better, and provide a litter tray and food inside. Like humans thrown into new surroundings, time is needed by cats to adjust.

Another possible explanation for Tulley's appearance may be that he was an old person's cat and the old person died. The surviving family cleared out the house

and forgot about the cat or couldn't find him. He could have run off with all the commotion in search of a safe place.

For weeks Tulley, sat on the couch in the sun porch all day, only moving to eat or rush outside for his toileting. Finally he ventured into the lounge and discovered the television. It appeared he had never seen a television set. He stared at it for hours. He didn't blink, his eyes became wider and wider and he didn't move a muscle. After several days of repeating this behavior, he decided he would "get" that moving thing inside the television. He explored the back of the set, he crawled all over the top of it, his eyes becoming ever larger until he finally realised nothing was going to jump out and grab him.

One of his favorite pastimes was sitting just inside the sun porch door waiting for a cat, any cat would do, to walk past the door. He would shoot out, jump on the unsuspecting cat who would growl, then speed back inside, jump onto the couch and pretend he had nothing to do with it. How innocent he could look with his smoochy demeanor and his wide yellow eyes. One of his least endearing traits was that when he was told off, he would pee in the most difficult places to clean. He would stare me straight in the face and pee on my bed while I was making it. He can be frustrating. He is also very loving. He thinks he owns me and no matter what happens during the day, it is forgotten when he cuddles into me every night. Every one of the other resident cats are well aware that they sleep elsewhere.

It can take many months to gain the trust of a stray and be able to give him the help and care he needs. A short haired black and white cat snuck up the drive at dusk one

warm night, and climbed up on a shelf of my outside potting stand.

Dusk had turned to dark before he was noticed and food was offered. He gulped every morsel then he disappeared. Several nights later just before dark, he returned. More food was offered; he gulped his fill, then he left. Back down the drive he ran, squeezing through the palings on the gate, then down the footpath close to all the front fence lines. For almost six months he arrived, each night at dusk, rain or shine, soaking or dry. As he became more comfortable, he visited for longer periods, eating rather than gulping his nightly offering.

He began to arrive earlier and earlier keeping a two metre distance but meowing his rusty greeting. His visits became expected each night and when one week passed without a sign of this black and white cat who had been named Dave, fears were held for his safety.

On the ninth day after his last appearance Dave managed, with great difficulty, to struggle up on the shelf to wait for food. In the nine days he had been missing, he had lost a huge amount of weight, his fur was falling out in chunks and he was dragging one of his hind legs. In extreme pain and as disabled as he was, he had made the very desperate effort to seek the only help he hoped he could rely on. Hurt as he was, he was unable to move away from a dog attack, a human attack or away from a car. He could not run to safety.

Desperate situations call for desperate measures. I knew one chance was all I would get with this frightened, unfriendly, injured and stray cat. I enlisted the help of my son Tony, as cage custodian. A carrying cage was

opened on the ground and Tony's job was to close the lid as soon as I had put Dave inside.

I donned sturdy mittens. Slowly I approached the injured Dave, closed both hands tightly around his thin body just under his armpits then as I pulled him towards me, pressed one hand down on his neck. I eased him very carefully toward the open cage, slid him inside onto a soft snow fleece blanket. Tony secured the lid and a dark blanket was laid across the cage. Cats settle very quickly so long as their cage is dark.

A trip to the Veterinarian and x-rays confirmed that Dave had broken both his hip and pelvis.

He could have been hit by a car or had a heavy object thrown at him. He would need four to six weeks of cage rest, Metacam to reduce his pain, plenty of good food, warmth (a hot bottle at night) and plenty of rest. Many people would have simply had the cat put down. Alternatively, after his rest and recuperation time, he would be as good as he ever was. I moved the holding cage from my spare room, to the cattery so Dave would have company for his six weeks of enforced rest.

He took his incarceration well. For the first three weeks he just ate and slept realising he was safe. His fur grew back and he became a sociable little boy who loved all the attention he was given.

After six weeks of care, Dave was released. He trotted down the drive, through the gate and back to wherever he had originally come from. His hip had healed. He could run, jump and climb and he would continue to find his way back to the shelf for his nightly meal. Slowly over the months that followed his confinement, Dave realised he didn't have to eat and run and he began coming inside

the house for his food then to sleep. It took quite some time but finally he has adopted my place as his place. Dave is an absolute gentleman. He is around four years of age now and hasn't got a nasty bone in his body. The more attention he gets from anyone the more he is prepared to give back. Whoever dumped Dave originally has missed out on a fantastic pet.

There are places in all cities and towns where cats are commonly dumped. Sad but true. A young woman, whose property in New Brighton backs on to one such area, began to feed three new arrivals, two tortoiseshell girls and one ginger male. Although usually a dog person, her dog had recently died, she did her best for the cats. Number one tortie had five kittens under the house. Arrangements were made with CPL to trap the tortie mother, spay her and return her to the woman.

No arrangements were made for the five very unsociable, spitting, clawing, growling, eight week old offspring. I became involved and advised the young woman to capture all five kittens, then call me. I socialised them and later they were re-homed.

Meanwhile tortie number two had four kittens approximately two weeks old. They were also under the house. With the disappearance of tortie number one's five kittens, tortie number two promptly removed her kittens up into the roof of the house. When number two Tortie's kittens were approximately six weeks old, the young woman once again contacted CPL.

She wanted the ginger boy caught and de-sexed and returned to her care. He could live with the two Torties and keep away any more strays.

Things were to go fatally wrong for the ginger boy. Some background to the changing political face of CPL is needed here. The original, now aging CPL members held firm to a philosophy of 'protecting cats.' Their focus was on de-sexing and re-homing stray and ownerless cats.

Over time, with the resignations and demise of the old guard, a new breed of volunteer has infiltrated its ranks. Cats Unloved was a group who spread the uninformed idea that all cats who do not have a home, regular food and warmth must be killed, that one must guarantee twenty years residence at one address to own a cat and further that all stray cats might spread AIDS. This group has fallen foul of the Christchurch City Council and has largely disbanded. However, its more zealous followers have taken up positions within the CPL. The difficulty for the public is that they ring CPL confidently expecting help for the cat not its execution.

The CPL volunteer who took the call to collect the ginger boy was a Cat's Unloved follower. The young woman who was prepared to keep and care for the ginger boy was told the cat might spread AIDS and since she could not guarantee she would still be living in the same house in twenty years time, the cat had to be put down. Not knowing overly much about cats the young woman reluctantly let the volunteer take the cat to his death.

The same volunteer said she'd come back to trap tortie number two. The young woman said she'd happily continue to care for tortie number two once she was spayed. She was horrified to be told that the mother and kittens would also be put down as "there was no room for them." Extremely upset, the young woman rang me. I

advised her to trap the mother, get the kittens down from the roof and call me. The trapping went smoothly. Tortie number two was de-sexed and returned to live with the young woman and tortie number one. The kittens were all re-homed.

A cat might become stray because it is not a dog. Strange but true. In one such instance the caring neighbour was the cats salvation. A tabby and white five year old female had lived her life with two pit bull terriers. Food had been tossed out on the grass for all three to grab what they could. The pit bull owners moved away from their address, took the dogs with them and left the cat behind. She had not been spayed so would have had several litters of kittens.

As she had lived with untrained dogs, what happened to her babies can only be guessed at. Enter the caring neighbour. After three months of feeding the very angry and violent cat, the persistent neighbour managed to entice the cat into her wash house, closing the door behind her. With difficulty, and without too many bites and scratches, the cat was shut in a carrying cage and delivered to the veterinarian for a check up. She growled, hissed, clawed the door, flew at anyone daring to enter the same room as her and constantly snarled. She was terrifying the other occupants at the veterinary clinic. I had a large open cattery, and for better or worse, I agreed to try and tame her.

The first rule for any cat coming into my care is to give it a name. She was named Madam Mim after the evil cartoon character but recognising her behavior wasn't her fault, her name developed into Mimsie. She had Chlamydia so Clavulox twice daily was required to be

pushed down her throat. As she had lived all her life with pit bulls, she acted just like one, she attacked my face. Not looking forward to the procedure imagine my amazement when Mimsie literally opened her mouth for the pink pill! Astonishingly, for the seven day course of antibiotics she only growled when she was picked up and swallowed her medication as she was expected to.

The socialising of Mimsie began in earnest. Stroking was always accompanied with food. She loved her food and though she growled continuously and loudly, she preferred to eat not attack. After each meal, she ran around the cattery hissing and bashing any cat or human who got in her way. As the weeks passed Mimsie's behaviour became less threatening. She hissed and growled less and chased rather than attacked the other cats in the cattery.

Six weeks after her rescue she came into season. Poor Mimsie! She crawled along the concrete cattery floor making noises sounding between a cry and a purr. She was very distressed. Needless to say Mimsie was whipped off to the veterinarian to be spayed. Spaying had been deferred until she showed less threatening behaviour. Surprisingly, she behaved herself in the veterinarian's care. Ten days later three stitches were removed without her drawing blood.

She would never come into season again and she would never have kittens to teach how to threaten humans.

Three months after she had been in my care, she was moved on to the re-homing cattery. Four days later I was rung to collect "this mad, violent cat."

"What's the problem?" I asked.

"She has attacked everyone of the workers."

"When do you want me?"

"As soon as you can!"

In my care, this once fiery girl had become an attention seeker, a lap sitter, a follower and loved to play with water squirting from the hose. It was obvious she had one enduring character flaw. For reasons known only to herself she would attack unexpectedly, viciously and without any provocation. Her main target was the face of her victim. By now when she attacked she rarely drew blood and adults could dodge her claws. If a child was Mimsie's target, the results could be disastrous. Mimsie was added to the increasing number of cats who, because of their dispositions be it psychological, sickness, or disability, would not be welcomed into a human family. After two years living in a safe environment she now sits on top of the letterbox at the end of "her" drive waiting for her selected few admirers to stroke her. She knows who they are as soon as they turn the corner into her street, and she knows the approximate time her "regulars" will appear.

She shows her appreciation for their attention as she rolls around in ecstasy on top of the letter box and when she has had enough, she disappears and waits for her next captivated human to appear. Cats behavior can be modified. It only takes time, sometimes lots and lots of it.

All stray cats originally had owners, some one who supposedly cared for them. Is it too much to ask of civilized people to be responsible, to de-sex their cat whether it be male or female, give it worm pills, treat it for fleas, ensure it is vaccinated and teach it to come in at night? It is a sad commentary on society that some of its most vulnerable inhabitants are currently treated so shabbily.

CHAPTER SIX.

GOOD CAT – BAD CAT

Rob, Griffin, Geos, Sparky, Tulley, Minty and more

Humans have domesticated cats over many centuries. Cats have therefore become dependent on humans to meet their needs. When owners fail their pet, who is after all only an animal, it must fend for itself. Base instinct or survival of the fittest takes over. I have often heard it said that male cats will kill kittens fathered by another tomcat. Yes, on occasion that does happen. It is not in the best interests of one male cat to raise another male's offspring. Survival of the fittest dictates the male of the colony preserves his genetic material by disposing of any kittens carrying his rival's genes. Female cats are also locked into survival mode and will from time to time kill their kittens. Rather than try and raise a weak kitten, she will be merciful and kill it. Not only does she put the kitten out of its misery but also saves herself from wasting energy better used to raise her remaining kittens. She may even kill her whole litter in a misguided effort to protect them from threat.*

Not all male cats kill kittens. In some instances non-neutered males, tomcats, have taken over nurturing responsibilities. More usually it is a role taken up by the more benevolent neutered males. Often, males will continue to nurture kittens long after their mothers have lost interest. Sparky (Chapter 4 & 6), Minty (Chapter 6) and Brierly (Chapter 4), had such relationships.

Adult male cats really do make the most tolerant

babysitters for any offspring. Rob was a large tabby I boarded for a friend one Christmas and New Year. What a no work cat he turned out to be. He settled straight in to the routine, he neither scratched, bit or grizzled, he just purred whenever he was approached.

* See Sarah Hartwell, (1996,2002) 'Cats that kill Kittens' www.messybeast.com/kill_kit.htm for a full discussion
Cleo's (Chapter 2), five eleven week old kittens were in the cattery with him during the day. In the evening the kittens were taken back to the spare room for their tea and the night. During the day they played under Rob's watchful care. Kittens at play can be rough with each other and often squeal loudly as if someone is really hurting them. The first time they really meowed and squealed very loudly, Rob came running. He halted about a cat length away from the noisy kittens, watched them for a minute to make sure they weren't killing each other, then sat down a short distance from their play and never took his eyes off them. Each time they squealed he would rise and wade into the "kitten heap", split them up and nose them away from each other. When the kittens were totally exhausted from their play, they would curl up often all together, and sleep. Rob would watch them until all was peaceful and find himself somewhere within watching distance, to stretch out and grab some well earned sleep. He loved those kittens and they loved him.

Another male Griffin, whose story is told later in Chapter 8, had been "in residence" for almost three months. I had no idea if he had even seen a kitten let alone had any up close experience with the younger version of himself. After all the resident cats had been fed, the kittens were released from the spare room. They bolted into the

kitchen and skidded to a halt. Five pairs of eyes stared at Griffin. He stared back. Slowly the five sneaked closer to Griffin, one step then stop, another step, another stop. Suddenly, one kitten, stretched as far as she could towards Griffin, patted his tail then backed quickly to where the other four were watching. Griffin stretched his full length along the floor, lay his head on the lino, twitched his tail and watched. Which kitten would be brave enough to touch his tail again? No more than ten minutes later, all five kittens were crawling all over Griffin and he loved every minute. If a cat could smile, Griffin was smiling then.

With Rob babysitting in the cattery and Griffin babysitting inside the house, Cleo's kittens were never allowed to get into trouble.

Not one of the female cats living with me has any time for any kittens.

Mitzi (Chapter 5), is now eight years old. If any kitten dares to look at her, it will be swiped. An evil glare is directed towards any kitten venturing a metre inside Mitzi's space. If any kitten either accidentally or purposefully visits Mitzi within paw striking distance, before anyone can act, Mitzi will have her whole arm across the unsuspecting kitten's neck and shoulders and continue to bash the offending, squealing kitten, with lightening fast strokes until it can wriggle its way out of her reach.

Of the other girls, Gracie (Chapter 5), growls but doesn't attempt to touch the kitten, Mimsie (Chapter 5), totally ignores them, as does Boots (Chapter 1). Pixel (Chapter 2), glares at them and tells them to get lost. I don't think

Coco (Introduction), even knows they are present and Annie (Chapter 10), just watches them. None of the female cats will make any attempt to be nice to them. None of the males will be anything other than nice.

Tulley (Chapter 5), now fifteen years old, slides his paw underneath the kittens tummy and tips them over. If any one of any batch of kittens visits him up close, he stretches his paw out towards the kitten and pats it. He is like an old Granddad.

Geos (Chapter 4), has his special place where he washes himself before he goes to bed for the night. It happened to be in the hall opposite the door of the room where the kittens slept. He was busily washing himself, and ignoring the eleven kittens in temporary residence at that time. He stretched his tail and flicked the end unconcerned at the audience of eleven watching him from the door of their room. Five of the kittens were sitting close together glancing at each other, looking at Geos then glancing back at each other. The kittens moved their heads closer together, they had all the moves of a human discussion, "you do it," "no, you do it." One of the kittens crept forward, stretched out its paw, touched Geos's tail and fled back into its place beside the others. This big, black feral cat lifted up his head from his ablutions and stared long and hard at the offender, then returned to his washing.

The kittens literally twittered between each other as the process of selecting another "offender" was completed. The next kitten crept, much faster this time and grabbed Geos's tail in both its paws. He turned to his wee mates meowing how brave he was. An unimpressed Geos growled his displeasure. The kitten dropped Geos's tail

and leapt back to the safety of his mates. They had been warned. Geos stared at the five culprits for several seconds then returned once more to his night time clean up. Another kitten was literally pushed towards Geos, after all they were cute and Geos must at least like one of them surely. Another growl from Geos, another dash into the middle of its mates then more twittering. If the kittens had been humans they may have remembered the three strikes and your out rule, but no, not them. Like young children, with no fear of any consequences they tried again. Another kitten was selected and jauntily he approached Geos. Geos had had enough. He jumped up, and rushed two steps towards the five not so clever kittens and snarled at them. All five kittens ran in all directions while Geos ambled back to his corner, leaned up against the wall and finished his nightly wash. Then he stood up, glared once again at the cowering kittens, strolled into his sleeping place in the bottom of the wardrobe, curled up and went to sleep. From that night on all the kittens gave Geos a very wide berth.

Not only are male cats capable of great compassion for kittens but also for their friends. Minty was discovered crying and cowering in a gutter in Pages Road. He was scooped up and delivered to me. His eyes were very blue so he had to be no more than between five and six weeks old. He was black with a few white hairs underneath his chin and he was covered in ringworm. As ringworm is highly contagious and could infect all the resident cats, the easy answer was to put him down. Not in my house. Ringworm is also easily eradicated with the correct medication. A trip to my trusty veterinarian and Minty's diagnosis was confirmed. The correct medication, Grisovet was prescribed and Minty's future looked rosy.

The medication is administered only once a day for a period of twenty eight days. One month's treatment out of a cat's fifteen or so years is not much to have a healthy, happy cat.

Five days after Minty was rescued and five days after his treatment for ringworm began, Minty developed cat flu. Sparky was nine months old when Minty arrived. Minty had to be washed and Sparky was mother. Though Minty had both ringworm and cat flu Sparky contracted neither. This tiny wee boy was now fighting for his life. The first sign of sickness was his total collapse, he couldn't stand up, he cried and shivered. I wrapped him in a wool blanket and rushed him to the veterinarian. An injection of antibiotic, an anti inflammatory and Vitamin K was administered as were instructions to keep him wrapped up warmly. Minty survived and went on to live an interesting and unusual fifteen years. He was well known and well liked by several neighbours. He would move in with a neighbour of his choice for a duration chosen by him then he would return home only to become restless again and "board," with someone else. He did condescend to spend the last three years of his life with me. He was a very small cat compared to the usually larger frame of the male of the species. He avoided fights, had a quiet, squeaky meow, loved sleeping on the bed beside the pillow when he was "in residence" and kept time better than any clock. He left home after breakfast and returned home at ten minutes to ten every night until the wandering bug again caught up with him.

When he was ten years old and had been living "elsewhere" for thirteen months he casually arrived home early one January evening with a tabby and white cat in tow. He stayed around the house not trotting off to his

secret places that only he knew about, until he was assured his friend was allowed to "reside comfortably" in his sometimes used home. As his "friend" had been attempting without success to enter his household at more or less tea time for four weeks before Minty accompanied her, she was given the name Tucker. Her story is told in Chapter 8.

Tulley was about six months younger than Minty, having appeared in the September before Minty turned three. Though they had grown up together along with the other strays in residence no apparent close relationship between the two cats had evolved or so I thought. The last three weeks of Minty's life were nothing short of amazing.

Months before his death, Minty began drinking more and more water. A trip to the veterinarian confirmed Minty's kidneys were slowly ceasing to work to clear all the toxins from his blood. Slowly his eating became more sporadic. He began losing weight. He was in kidney failure, one of the most common causes of a cat's death. As his need for cold water became more and more frequent, he began to struggle up on the bench to drink from the tap I left dripping for him. He would jump down on the floor but an hour later he was back on the bench, drinking.

He slowly became too weak to either get up on the bench or get down off it so he began sleeping on the end of the bench, close to the water. Tulley jumped up on the bench and sat beside a failing Minty. For the following three weeks, as Minty's life ebbed away, the only time Tulley left his side was to go outside to the toilet. He would race outside, across the drive, dig, toilet, cover, then race

back inside to be with Minty. Each time Minty struggled up and to the dripping tap for a drink, Tulley would walk the few steps beside him. Minty lay on the bench, not moving, not aware of anyone or anything. It was time to let him die peacefully. As the veterinarian stopped his car at my gate, Tulley gave Minty one last face lick, then jumped down off the bench and disappeared. After the veterinarian had left, Tulley returned. He stood at the kitchen door, gazed at Minty lying on the bench then turned away, jumped up on his favourite terrace fence and began to wash himself.

Cats are not generally credited with any emotions except perhaps their own selfishness. Tulley and Minty had a strong bond of friendship of which I was unaware. Minty was very comfortable with Tulley's company and Tulley was happy to give it to a needy Minty.

Sparky went on to mother Brierly (Chapter 4) and live to the great age of nineteen years and four months before dying peacefully in his sleep.

When cats are abandoned they must resort to and operate on survival mode but when they are loved and cared for, they are capable of great love and affection.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISPOSABLE KITTENS

Zoe, Sox, Cloudy, Charlie, Purina 1, Purina 2, Poppy, Purina 3, Fudge, Trouble, Trouble 2, Garry, Tinkerbelle, Saffy, Johnson, Nike, Calico, Calico 2, Tab, Minka, Cinnamon, Biskat and many more

Stray adult cats have to some extent age, cunning and experience on their side when they need to find a new home or just survive. Kittens are much more vulnerable and must trust that their needs are met either by their mother or a caring human. When owners elect not to de-sex their pets, it is the beginning of and direct cause of needless cruelty to kittens too young to help themselves.

Three young teenagers, two boys and a girl, were chasing each other, playing hide and seek among the reeds on Sumner Beach. They discovered a brown paper bag. One of the teens picked up the paper bag and because it felt soft, opened the top and glanced inside. Five kittens, only days old were shivering at the bottom of the bag. They had woken when the bag was moved. They began to squeak and crawl towards where they hoped warmth, food and their mother was waiting. Aware the kittens needed warmth immediately, the three rescuers removed the desperate kittens from the paper bag and slid them down the front of their clothing.

As they hurried from the beach, discussing where they could take the kittens to save their tiny lives, one of the rescuers tripped over a cardboard box. Inside the tightly taped box were three four week old kittens. With panic

and helplessness threatening to swamp these caring teens they rushed the eight dumped kittens to the nearest veterinarian. They were directed to the CPL. They detoured to a pet shop who accepted the offered three four week old kittens. When they arrived at the CPL, the kittens were barely alive and the rescuers were extremely agitated.

"They're going to die. Don't let them die." cried the visibly distressed girl teen.

I was working that day so when the three teens rushed into the shop, and seeing the desperate, squealing, tiny kittens, I quickly grabbed a cardboard carton and some woolen jerseys, laid the kittens close together in the middle of them and covered them over with the doubled up jerseys. Another volunteer hurried to the veterinarian for formula to feed the tiny kittens then drove them to her home.

She began the exhausting procedure of feeding each kitten a measured amount of warmed formula every two hours, of washing the kittens faces after each feed, cleaning their vital parts, heating hot water bottles to keep them warm and finding a soft toy to take the place of their mother. Day and night the wonderful, elderly, very experienced volunteer fought for the five kitten's lives. Two days after their arrival, the first kitten died. One by one over the next week another three of the tiny kittens died. The fifth kitten, a brindle tortoiseshell girl, survived. The volunteer, unable to part with her, named her special charge Zoe. Zoe will always be a small cat but thanks to the volunteer's tireless effort, she is also a happy and healthy wee girl.

The tragedy is that three months later, Zoe's mother will have more kittens. In all likelihood those kittens will also end up in paper bag. All that is needed to halt the cycle is to have the mother cat spayed. The de-sexing of cats, both male and female is a small once only cost, saving rescuers emotional pain and kittens from suffering inhumane acts is a priceless and everlasting gift.

Regrettably some cat owners are very slow to do the right thing by their pets. Sometimes several litters of kittens are born before the cat owner acts and de-sexes their pet. I became involved with such a family and a mother cat called Sox. She was a very small, three year old black and white cat made to live outside under a tree. She had five successive litters before a concerned neighbour persuaded the owner to have her cat spayed. The only kitten to survive from the first litter was Cloudy, a long haired grey kitten. A neighbour rescued Cloudy when she found her at four months of age, searching for food in her rubbish bin.

She delivered Cloudy to me. Fleas were jumping off her, her faeces were tightly entwined worms, her fur was endy and sticking together in lumps and she was skin and bone. Her first visit to the veterinarian included a Drontal tablet down her throat to kill the worms and Frontline flea treatment squeezed from the tube onto the skin at the back of her neck. The worms would be passed the following day in her faeces. She was also vaccinated to prevent cat flu.

Kittens are resilient and Cloudy proved the rule. With regular good quality food, offered initially four times a day, beginning with small helpings then increasing in size, she quickly regained her condition. She learnt to

play like all kittens are entitled to. Cloudy became Miss Independent. She joined an expanding band of rescued kittens waiting for re-homing.

Rescuers come in all shapes and sizes. Their one identifying characteristic is that they care. Charlie, a black and white short haired boy, had been handed to me by his twelve year old rescuer. Charlie had been sitting on top of a high fence post crying and shivering, so his rescuer pulled him down and delivered him to where she knew he would be safe. Charlie appeared to have been held tightly against the end of a vehicle exhaust pipe probably to kill him. He had a round stain, a little larger than a milk bottle top, covering his nose and mouth that smelled strongly of petrol. He'd managed to escape but had apparently been grabbed by his tail as he struggled to free himself suffering a broken tail in two places. He was very disoriented and staggered rather than walked. He appeared to have difficulty focusing and identifying the direction of any noise. He recovered completely over the following fortnight, grew rapidly and developed a big attitude.

Charlie considered he was king but Cloudy knew he wasn't. She played with the toys provided and with whomever she chose. When all of the kitten's cohabitating in the one room were tired, they would crawl into the communal bed, a fluffy lined cardboard carton, and sleep.

Two other kittens I had inherited around this time, were Purina one and Purina two. They were two tortoiseshell girls, given to me when their owner ran out of money and couldn't feed the numerous cats she owned. They would

sit, one under each of Charlie's arms. Cloudy refused his protection and sat behind him, close but not touching. Purina one and Purina two were Charlie's subservient girls, Cloudy never was. All these kittens were successfully re-homed.

Meanwhile Sox had a second litter. Only one of her kittens survived for any length of time. The kitten was black and white like her mother. She staggered across the path of the lady who delivered circulars in the street. The circular lady felt sorry for the poor underfed wee girl and carried it to her home in her newspaper bag. Her new owner took the kitten to the veterinarian and paid to have her de-sexed when she was six months old. That's two of Sox's kittens who found caring owners.

Sox now just over a year old, had her third litter. She was still living outside under the tree with her kittens and was fed at irregular intervals by her owner. Poppy, also black and white, was rescued when she was found scavenging for food. She was barely four weeks old, covered in fleas and full of worms. She was the last surviving kitten from Sox's third litter. Poppy thrived with warmth and good quality food. She grew rapidly. When she was ten weeks old I moved her to the re-homing cattery. She was chosen by a little girl to live with her and her mother.

Sox had a fourth litter. One of her kittens, yet another Purina. I really liked that name. Perhaps the subliminal advertising impressed me since it was a newly developed cat food on the market at the time. All the Purina's were Tortoiseshell cats. Purina three had found her way across the street and moved in with another family. She developed conjunctivitis which without veterinarian

treatment, further developed into rhinitis. Her sinus tubes blocked making her breathing extremely difficult. Neither her real or adopted owners took responsibility for her. When Purina three was finally rescued and rushed to a veterinarian the damage was well and truly done.

Many medications were prescribed and administered to control her respiratory problem. Three months later when she was to be spayed, great care was taken in the choice of anesthetic but to no avail. She never recovered consciousness. Her death was due to neglect and therefore preventable. She at least knew kindness and was given food and love for three months of her short life.

Sox still hadn't been spayed so had a fifth litter. The smallest kitten and last survivor of the litter was a long haired brown girl, later named Fudge.

Fudge was given to a family in the next street. This was to be her new home.

The move into a new family did not improve Fudge's lot. Fudge's new family included not only the humans but also an un-spayed dog. The dog had given birth to seven puppies. When they were six weeks old, they were passed over to a pet shop for homing. There were two other cats, sisters, in the household and neither were de-sexed.

Fudge, female and un-de-sexed, was expected to once again increase the owner's cat numbers. She wasn't a year old before she gave birth to four kittens. When her kittens were two weeks old, Fudge developed a calcium deficiency, the symptoms of which are similar to epileptic fits. As with humans, after a fit total exhaustion sets in. Her owner appeared on my doorstep with a desperately

sick Fudge and her kittens. Fudge's owner was read the riot act by me. I offered to take Fudge and her two week old babies, nurse her back to full health, de-sex her then re-home both Fudge and her kittens when they were old enough. "No I want the kittens," was the eleven year old daughter's demand. Their request was I "fix them all up, pay the bill and give the wee family back." I declined but impressed on the owner that Fudge needed immediate care or she would die. We reached a compromise and for the first time in Fudge's life, she was taken to a veterinarian and his instructions followed by the owner. With correct medication and cat not dog food Fudge temporarily improved over the next four weeks. The kittens were now six weeks old. One of her male kittens was given away. The remaining three kittens, two girls and a boy, added to the growing number of animals in the family.

Fudge deteriorated. The owner decided to get rid of Fudge because she was once again very sick and going to need veterinarian care. She was handed over to me.

The veterinarian diagnosed Fudge as having developed septicemia and a bowel infection sometime between the calcium deficiency and the owner's decision to "give her away." The tiny cat's temperature was 40.1 degree, dangerously high for a cat. An immediate injection of antibiotic was administered and Vibravet was prescribed, to be popped down Fudge's throat twice a day for ten days. Slowly this very small, very neglected wee girl improved, this time permanently. She now lives with a de-sexed male cat in Papanui. Her new home is her slice of heaven.

As for Fudge's kittens, both had to be treated with antibiotics for a Chlamydia infection. One of the kittens, a

calico tortoiseshell, had suffered from an inner ear infection which was never treated. It left the kitten with a permanent, very visible tilt of her head. She couldn't look behind her without lifting her head upwards to look over her shoulder. They were now of an age where they two would be having kittens.

What happened to them and all the other reproducing animals at this address? With lots of persuasion and intervention from both dog and cat welfare organisations, the dog was spayed and Fudges two girls were finally de-sexed at six months of age all at a very reasonable cost. The owner contributed the minimum amount possible and couldn't see why she should really.

The story of Sox, her subsequent five litters, the death of most of her kittens, the giving away of the rest because they are male and wont have more kittens, or because they are sick, is not unusual.

Thank goodness there are still those among us with a conscience who care and do the right thing. One such person was a worker clearing a patch of planted shrubs beside the road on the Christchurch side of Ashburton. He was thinking about Christmas dinner with his mother, his next stop after work.

He discovered a tightly closed and securely tied down cardboard carton. He picked the carton out of the back of the shrub patch and as he was about to throw it on the deck of the truck, thought he heard a noise. Though the smell coming from the inside of the box was strong, when he finally peeled away the wide tape binding the flaps and cut the heavy twine he was greeted by a hardly audible meow. Inside were four kittens. Three were dead

and one was barely alive.

The worker headed for the nearest veterinarian. He was advised, because of the terrible condition of the wee girl, later named Trouble because of her mischievous behavior, that she should be put down. She was skin and bone, flea infested, had ulcers in both eyes and would probably be blind. The worker had rescued the poor little kitten and he just couldn't kill her. The worker's mother lived next door to a CPL volunteer, so he made a quick decision to take the kitten to her hoping she could "make her live." The veterinarian, though expressing doubt, prescribed the necessary medications.

Eye drops and antibiotics were administered twice daily as were six very small meals of kitten food. Slowly this wee scrap improved. Though the ulcer in one eye cleared completely doubt was expressed by the veterinarian that the sight in the second eye would improve. Two months after her rescue and yet another visit to the veterinarian and Trouble's sight was confirmed in both eyes. From the tiny bag of bones, trapped in a carton with her three dead siblings, Trouble became a mischievous and normal kitten. Trouble loved to sneak up behind the adult cats, pat their tails then disappear. By the time the adult cat spun around to swipe at the offender, Trouble was out of reach and out of sight. She was four and a half months old when her turn came to be moved to the re-homing cattery. It took only three days for her to teach all the other teenage kittens how to cause havoc. Trouble now has a real home, a great ending for a deserving wee girl and a pat on the back for her rescuer who refused to give up on his roadside find.

Many dumped kittens are never found and die but some

are chance finds and get a second opportunity at life.

The weekly rubbish collection in Christchurch saw the conscientious residents of Wainoni Road lining their black rubbish bags up like soldiers along the edge of the footpath. While waiting at a bus stop on her way to work, a prospective rescuer idly glanced at the rubbish bags waiting to be collected. One was leaning against the white bus stop pole and appeared to be moving. Curiously and cautiously the rescuer untied the black strip that fastened the top of the rubbish bag slowly and looked inside the black plastic bag. Three pairs of eyes stared unblinkingly up towards the light. The tiny kittens were lifted from the rubbish inside the bag and delivered by their rescuer to the nearest veterinarian. The kittens were collected and placed in the care of a volunteer, my daughter Charon.

The three kittens, one tabby girl, one black male and one black and white male, judging by their size, were considered to be no more than four weeks old. On further investigation it was discovered that the kittens' eyes had completely changed from the blue they were born with to hazel suggesting the kittens age was nearer seven weeks of age. Kittens are born with blue eyes which change colour when they are five to six weeks of age. Eye colour is a means of approximating the age of kittens. The girl, named Trouble Two, weighed 275 grammes and was too weak to stand unaided. Her brothers were both 298 grammes and grossly underweight. They could stand unaided but were unsteady on all four paws.

All three kittens had gastroenteritis with diarrhea. They were all prescribed a specially prepared diet available

from the veterinarian. They had their own closed in basket with a small opening for entrance and exit. Warm hot water bottles were laid beneath where the tiny bodies huddled together. The first night, Trouble Two struggled out of her basket and didn't have the strength to climb back inside. The wee girl was found shivering and stretched out on the floor. Scooping her up, Charon carefully slid the kitten into her daughter's bed and onto the electric blanket. Slowly the tiny ball of fur warmed and stopped shaking and was returned to the basket to be with her siblings.

All three kittens were fed baby kitten formula from a bottle and within two weeks no one would have recognised the three kittens as being the three rescued from a Wainoni Road rubbish bag. Eventually they were re-homed. The not so wee tabby girl now lives at Woodend with a mature ginger de-sexed boy called Bob and a pair of doting humans. She has developed into a rolly polly dumpling, totally opposite to the weak, cold wee girl huddled in a rubbish bag, waiting to die. She is still called Trouble.

Another chance find was Garry, named after Sponge Bob Square Pant's pet snail. A Dad was driving from Ashburton to Christchurch with his two young children. A toilet stop was necessary so the Dad pulled into a park. As the children were stretching their legs they came across a secure box. Dad looked inside and Garry looked back. The six week old, ginger boy was delivered to me after the obligatory veterinarian visit to be de-fleaed and de-wormed and examined. He had conjunctivitis, so Conoptol eye drops were needed twice daily. The antibiotic Noroclav was also prescribed and administered

down his tiny throat also twice daily. Kittens are resilient and bounce back with regular food warmth and care. Within three weeks Garry was fit and ready to be found a new home with someone who would not throw him away in a park. He lives with a family of four older children and a second re-homed kitten.

Chance finds of abandoned kittens can and do happen when least expected. Tinkerbelle, a nine week old silver tabby girl, Saffy a four and a half month boy and fourteen week old Johnson, all arrived separately into my care and within days of each other. A lady was walking her two dogs early one morning. The normally obedient dogs were worrying a particular clump of long grass so their owner walked to her dogs to investigate. A terrified, shaking Tinkerbelle was crouched in fear in the long grass. The dog's owner scooped up the very small kitten and delivered her to her trusty veterinarian.

Saffy had found his way into a Rakaia house and had hidden under a bed.

The house owner's daughter from Christchurch was visiting her mother. The mother had been amazed to find a black kitten hiding underneath her bed and as she already had two cats chose not to keep Saffy. She did make sure he was found another home. Her daughter took Saffy back to Christchurch and delivered him to the CPL.

A woman walking her dog late evening, in the dark, was accosted by Johnson. He had been following some young teenagers who were trying to shoo him away. Finally one teen picked Johnson up, dumped him over the nearest fence and said to her companions "run." He

struggled out onto the footpath again, dived across the busy road to the lady walking her dog. She picked him up and began knocking on doors hoping to find his owner. When no one claimed the wee fellow, she delivered him to the CPL.

Both Tinkerbelle and Saffy were in very good health. Though they had been dumped they had been well looked after. Johnson wasn't quite so lucky. He was underweight, but lots of good kitten food would put back the weight he should have. Unfortunately someone had put a flea collar around his neck, and he had had an adverse reaction to the collar. Half of his wee neck was bare of fur, his bare skin had been rubbed quite deeply leaving a long cut of raw flesh visible. Collars of any sort, around kitten's necks are an absolute and definite no. Eventually his wounds healed and he and his room mates were re-homed.

Not all chance finds of dumped kittens end happily ever after. A couple and their dog, were relaxing by the bank of the Rakai River. Their dog was running around, barking and just being a happy dog. It began worrying a piece of the bank and when the dog's owners investigated they found two tiny kittens huddled up together. On further inspection, they found one of the kittens was dead and the other one was cuddled up against her sibling's dead body, gasping in the hot sun. The concerned dog owner tried to feed the one living kitten. She didn't have the expertise needed so handed the kitten to a very experienced CPL fosterer. Unfortunately, even after every effort was made, the wee kitten died. The ongoing tragedy is that the dead kitten's mother while she remains unspayed, will have many

more litters of kittens and almost all will be dumped.

One chance find that did work out well was Nike, a ten week old wee boy.

As he staggered along the footpath past the florist shop in Ferry Road opposite Portstone Nurseries, a group of teenage boys were observed by the Florist, using the tiny grey and white kitten as a football. As each boy booted the hapless kitten loud laughter could be heard. The florist chased the boys for two blocks until she could scoop the now injured kitten into her arms safely away from further attack. As Portstone Nursery also sold kittens along with garden plants, the florist delivered the rescued wee kitten into their care. The kitten was doused in powder to kill the fleas and was probably given a pill to kill the worms that always accompany fleas. The kitten was then put in a cage with several other cats where it huddled in one corner.

After worrying all night about the future of the injured kitten and unhappy with the minimum treatment it had received from the plant nursery, the following morning the florist rang the CPL and was advised that the kitten could be collected immediately. The florist retrieved the kitten from Portstone, and after paying a nominal amount for the treatment it had received from them the previous night, handed over the grey and white boy to the volunteer, my daughter Charon.

Next stop for Nike was the veterinarian. He had been kicked so hard severe swelling around his pelvis and hips was obvious and painful. Nike couldn't walk upright; he dragged his back legs behind him as he attempted to move. His recovery was slow but steady. Along the way

he was introduced to a kitten sized feeding bottle. He soon realised that each time Charon called him his bottle would follow. As well as the bottles contents providing him with much needed nourishment, it became his reassurance. He would lie on his back and suck the teat through the side of his mouth. Life wasn't so bad after all. When Nike was sufficiently improved, had increased his weight and muscle tone, he was chosen to live with a couple who would treat him "in the manner to which he had become accustomed," which included the bottle feeds. Two years later after the couple parted ways, Nike was re-homed. He now lives with a family who have absolutely no idea what obstacles their huge grey and white, very sociable de-sexed male cat has had to overcome. They all just love him.

Many people who happen upon kittens are at a loss as to what to do when things don't go as they expect. Five three week old kittens were discovered among the shrubbery, outside the Aranui high school tuck shop. A teacher put them in a cardboard box on top of an old woolen jersey, and put them back where they had been discovered in the hope the mother cat would return to them. When she hadn't arrived by lunchtime, the teacher rang the CPL for help. My daughter and I found the little family, hungry and cold. We transferred the five kittens from the cardboard box to the carrying cage. The tuck shop was open and several school pupils were buying their lunch. We asked them if anyone had seen an adult cat around? Several of the pupils stated they had seen a "motley brown and black" cat sometimes. The general description of a brindle tortoiseshell.

The kittens were in quite good condition but, at

approximately three weeks old, too small to drink from a saucer. My daughter settled them into her home. She and my grand daughter fed them four times a day with a syringe and cleaned the wee family. The kittens thrived and when they were ten weeks old homes were found for each one.

Nine months later, from underneath a house in Shortland Street, on the other side of the school tuck shop, five kittens appeared one by one. They were followed by a large, brindle tortoiseshell cat. The "motley brown and black" cat had been located. The owners of the house had no idea they had borders beneath their foundations. The kittens were three black, one ginger and one "motley brown" mother cat look alike. All five kittens were homed. I called the mother, Calico.

She has been spayed and now lives with her new owner who works night shift and just needs a cat for company. That will suit Calico nicely. "You feed me, I'll listen as long as you want to talk." She will be very happy with that arrangement.

Many kittens are left behind when residents change addresses. For some reason people see kittens as things, not living beings entitled to food, shelter and warmth.

Calico, yes another one, was a four week old tortoiseshell girl with orange, black and brown patches, Tab, a tabby boy and Cinnamon, a brindle tortoiseshell girl were left in the shed of a house in Aranui. These four week old kittens were very hungry but in reasonably satisfactory condition. The owners took the mother of the kittens with them and left the weenies to fend for themselves.

I collected the three kittens and added them to the other seven kittens already resident in the spare room in my house. All three scoffed the meal offered them and began making friends with the other residents. The only mother cat in the room was Minka who with her two kittens had been rescued from an expanse of empty ground bordered by Bexley Road, belonging to the Christchurch City Council and filled with rubbish.

Two days after their rescue Calico, huddled in the corner of the couch in the room where they all lived. She wouldn't look at food, wouldn't move or drink. She had acute diarrhea. On day three of her rescue she was rushed to the emergency veterinarian. Coxicidiosis was diagnosed and the veterinarian detailed the ease with which the disease could infect all the kittens and the deadly outcome if precautions were not carried out. The infection is mainly transmitted through faeces. Medication was prescribed for all the kittens for five days to reduce the possibility of the infection spreading to the uninfected kittens, while Calico was medicated for ten days.

Eradicating possible sources of infection was the next step. I always used mulch for the kittens toilet trays then tipped the used contents on my extensive garden. Every piece of mulch had to be scooped up from where it had been tipped, put into rubbish bags then taken to the dump away from my property. Every toilet tray, every food container the kittens ate off and every piece of warm rug they curled up on had to be disinfected. The floor had to be cleaned several times each day with disinfectant.

Each time I handled the kittens or anything that touched

them, my hands had to be washed and dried thoroughly.

Though several deathly predictions were made Calico recovered and not one of the other kittens or the one mother was infected. Calico now lives with a school teacher and family, Tab was chosen by a family who wanted a Tabby with no white anywhere in his coat but no one wanted Cinnamon. Brindle tortoiseshell cats, my favorite, are not first choice with many people. While she was living in the re-homing Cattery, Cinnamon became attached to a very shy wee male kitten. They played together, slept together and sauntered together around the perimeter of the pen they lived in. The two, Cinnamon eight months old and the wee boy six months, were eventually taken home to live with one of the volunteers who cleaned the cattery. Inheriting unwanted cats is an occupational hazard for those who work with stray and abandoned cats.

Sometimes people home kittens and in doing so miss out important information for the new owner. Biskat, a tabby tortoiseshell and white girl of less than a year old had been given away to a new home as a very small kitten. The new owners were assured the kitten was a boy, a very common and often purposeful mistake made by the giver of the kitten. Biskat's new owners were unaware that a tortoiseshell cat or a cat with tortoiseshell coloring in its coat is always a girl.

Biskat duly had three kittens, all boys. When the kittens were six weeks old the owners returned to the United Kingdom leaving the cat and kittens to be re-homed.

Two weeks after Biskat and her boys came to me, five

eight week old kittens were rescued from underneath a house in New Brighton. Their mother, a resident stray, was easily captured and spayed and kept by the owner of the house. The kittens, three boys and two girls were terrified. They spat, clawed, hissed, backed away and huddled tightly together each time they were approached. Within two weeks all but one of this small family were confident, enjoying attention, purring, liking human contact and eating like little horses.

Biskat's three sociable, healthy babies now nine weeks old, were all re-homed. Biskat was at a loose end. She turned her attention to the other five kittens. I have a system where by all kittens in my care spend each day outside in a wire netting enclosed cattery and each night inside a special room in my house. After breakfast, all kittens are removed in secure cages and returned to the cattery for the day. Before their dinner, they are returned to their room inside the house.

Each morning, after the cats in the cattery have had their breakfast and those who are permanent long stay cats are released for the day, Biskat waited at the cattery door in anticipation. When the five kittens arrived in their cage, she meowed and fussed until the cage lid was lifted and the five kittens clambered to their wet nurse, their surrogate mother. Fussy Biskat washed each one, then lay on her side while they all drank noisily. Biskat was in heaven. She rolled her head back, stretched as far as she could to accommodate the five kittens. Her eyes rolled as she purred. She was barely a year old herself. Hopefully one day someone special will turn up to the cattery door and fall in love with this very deserving girl.

Often the rescuers heart is in the right place but their knowledge of cats and kittens and normal life cycle behavior is not complete. There are those who take home abandoned kittens, feed them and care for them as they grow from kittens into adult cats. The now adult cats reproduce kittens of their own and without regular contact with humans the new kittens become unable to be handled. As more kittens are rescued and added to the colony, more kittens grow into adulthood.

They too reproduce further increasing the cat population. Altruism is wonderful if accompanied with commitment. Unfortunately, one does not necessarily follow the other. To merely rescue kittens without de-sexing them, only increases the numbers of cats too wild to find a real human address.

It takes very little time for a cat population to overwhelm their owners. A young mother of four children requested help to feed her two un-spayed female cats and their several litters of kittens. Cat number one had seven kittens from two litters. Three were four and a half months old and four were six weeks old. She was very likely pregnant with a further litter. The first litter was born in August, the second litter the second week in January and the third litter was due to arrive the first week in May.

Cat number two had four one week old kittens. The cats and kittens needed feeding. As the cat's owner was on a limited income, food kindly donated by the caring citizens of Christchurch was available to the owner to feed her cat family.

The cat owner in turn, agreed to have number one cat spayed and if she was pregnant at the time of her operation to have the kittens aborted. The owner was

required to pay part of the cost of her cats operation. Number two cat would be spayed when her kittens were six weeks old. Neither cat would have more kittens. All the eleven kittens would be found homes. Every kitten's new owner would be required to pre-pay for their new kitten's de-sexing, preventing a repeat of the original escalation of cat numbers. A satisfactory result all round.

Yet it seems that in our complex world de-sexing of kittens is a concept too simple to grasp. People would rather allow their cats to have kittens then give them away. A Christmas Issue of the Buy, Sell and Exchange had a large number of advertisements "Kittens to Give Away". Two hundred kittens were offered free in one issue of a weekend paper. As half the number, one hundred kittens, will be female, four hundred new kittens, an average of four per litter will be born before the following Xmas. On and on it goes.

Worse still are the people who don't give their unwanted kittens away. A family was evicted from a Housing New Zealand property in Opawa leaving behind severe damage to the house and blocked drains. A Plumber began clearing the drains to identify the blockage. He pulled countless tiny drowned kitten bodies from the blocked drain. The tenants had dumped the new born litters of kittens down the toilet and pulled the chain.

Humans have a long history with cats. We have domesticated them and made them dependent on us for their needs. Kittens are much more vulnerable than the older and wiser adult cats. They trust that their needs are met either by their mother or a caring human. When owners elect not to de-sex their pets, it is the beginning and direct cause of needless cruelty to kittens too young

to help them selves. Mandatory de-sexing of all kittens at 1 kilogram or three months of age, which ever comes first, saves rescuers from heartache but more importantly saves kittens from suffering neglect, pain and other associated atrocities.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

Epsom, Jake, Maggie, Tucker/Muffin, Stanley/Lynux, Griffin, Slinky, Milo, Max and more

Cats, like humans, do get sick. Humans visit their health provider, their doctor. Responsible cat owners transport their pet to their chosen veterinarian. Like human illness, cat illness's cover the whole spectrum from those which are minor and easily treated to those which are life threatening.

Minor health problems include fur balls. Cats groom often. As a result the fur they swallow compacts into fur balls in their stomachs. The recognisable symptoms are the cat "swallowing hard" which looks like the cat is gagging. It will chew grass to make its self sick. The offending fur ball is thrown up. Fur balls are more common in the spring when the cat looses its warm, thick winter coat and in the autumn when it looses the fur that makes up the thinner summer coat. If the cat is having difficulty throwing up their unwanted fur, five mls of paraffin or olive oil will often help in its removal.

Signs that a cat may be developing a more serious illness are, if they suddenly stop eating, become very lethargic, have difficulty holding their head up, sleep when they would otherwise be prowling and getting into mischief and not wanting to acknowledge their owner or be disturbed under any circumstances. These signs are serious and a visit to the veterinarian is essential. Often the reason for appearing unwell is an infection and

antibiotics are prescribed. Usually a seven day course of the correct medication for the diagnosed sickness will have the cat fit, well and back to its old demanding self.

As with human teeth, a cat's teeth sometimes need dental care. Extractions might be needed on occasion. Every cat needs to be de-wormed and de-fleaed regularly with the correct pharmaceuticals available from the veterinarian. If a cat catches a bird it is likely to ingest the worms that birds often carry. If a cat has worms it will have fleas. Worms and fleas "go together" like night and day or pen and ink. Worm pills purchased off a supermarket shelf do not eradicate both round worms and tape worms. Regular treatment, at the very least twice a year and with both worm and flea treatment purchased from a veterinarian, will keep the pet cat healthy. When cats have fleas, tiny particles like sand which are actually flea dirt, will be visible if a comb is run through the cat's fur. Fleas will also appear on the combs teeth very much alive and crawling. If a cat has worms, white worms will be visible in the cat's faeces. Appropriate medication for both flea and worm control is only available from the health provider of choice for a pet, the veterinarian.

Humans choose to be vaccinated to prevent various illnesses. Cats also should be vaccinated for the same protection. Humans who are at risk from extreme effects of Influenza are advised to be vaccinated. Feline Rhinotracheitis and Calicivirus viruses are both deadly if contracted and can be prevented with vaccination.

One Saturday morning Epsom, the tortoiseshell tabby girl who lived in the house next door to mine, began to

dribble from her mouth. At first, her dribble was a stream that came, stopped then later began again. By mid-morning Saturday, Epsom's stream had developed into a bubbling froth. She would lick her face clean, the froth would cease then half an hour it would begin again. She was still eating and drinking. She was taken to the veterinarian, an upper respiratory infection was suspected. She was given an injection of Clavulox and an anti-inflammatory medication. She was prescribed a further ten days Clavulox medication.

In spite of her Clavulox Injection, by evening Epsom was gasping and struggling to breathe. Her mouth was continually open as she gulped what air she could in between the now constant bubbling, frothy fluid.

She was dehydrating at an alarming rate. She was rushed in to the after hours veterinarian. Since her symptoms had worsened, the possibility of an obstruction down her throat was suspected. As Epsom was not keen on any further examination, she would have to be sedated so the veterinarian could examine her thoroughly and make a correct diagnosis. Epsom spent the night in the emergency hospital. Her temperature was 40 .2 degrees centigrade, which is high for a cat. She was x-rayed, and she had fluids syringed under her skin to combat her dehydration. She was given several doses of Atropine and a dose of Metoclopramide, AquaFol, Temgesic, Metacam and Acezine. She was diagnosed with both the Calici and Herpes Viruses. Epsom had cat flu. Her owners had not vaccinated her, if they had, Epsom would not have to fight so hard for her life.

Epsom was collected from the emergency hospital late on Sunday night. Luckily she was still in my care. She

had to be isolated from all other cats so once again, out came the trusty cage. To protect all the other cats in my care from contracting even a slight snuffle from the very sick Epsom, the cage Epsom would spend the following ten days in would be completely covered. When she sneezed, the germs that would spread Epsom's sickness would be unable to reach the air the rest of the cats would breathe.

For four days, Epsom sniffed her food without interest. Though she would not eat, she most definitely needed to drink. She was offered Lactulose free, special cat milk which she regularly lapped. She was offered kitten food regularly even though she wasn't interested in eating. Her mouth and throat were full of ulcers which would need to heal. Five days after her night in the hospital, she actually ate and enjoyed a small portion of kitten food mixed with warm water. Her progress continued and ten days after her brush with death, the door of the cage was left open and Epsom was able to please herself whether she stayed enclosed or investigated her surroundings. She of course, chose the latter. After two weeks, and on a lovely sunny day, Epsom was happy to venture outside, visit her actual owners, then return for her tea and stay the night.

She is now vaccinated and is protected from a repeat brush with death. The percentage of cats who die from cat flu is 60 to 65 percent. Epsom, because of the excellent treatment she received at the after hours veterinarian clinic, escaped becoming a statistic. Had she been vaccinated when she was three months old then again a year later, her symptoms, after coming into contact with an infected cat, would only have been a day or two of intermittent sneezing.

Jake, a four month old tabby and white boy, had not been vaccinated at the required twelve weeks. Jake's mother was one of nine neglected, constantly reproducing cats. He developed Rhinotracheitis. His owner took him to a veterinarian to be euthanised. Unable to put the very friendly, outgoing wee boy down, the veterinarian rang me.

Rhinotracheitis is swollen and blocked breathing passages. Jake's ability to play, climb trees, roll around in the sun or just play with a woolen mouse was severely restricted. Cold temperatures made him gasp for breath. When he was six months old the decision was made to neuter him. With crossed fingers and great trepidation, I delivered him to the veterinarian for his surgery. He survived his operation and groggy with the anesthetic, he crept toward the front of his cage, delighted to see me.

His respiratory condition continued to worsen. Several different combinations of medication were tried without any visible improvement. When Jake was eleven months old, the decision was made that the veterinarian would attempt to surgically clear his sinus passages. Unfortunately Jake did not survive the only chance he had to breathe normally. He could have had a normal healthy life if only he had been vaccinated against the deadly disease. Prevention is always the preferable option.

Where prevention is not a possibility then early diagnosis and treatment is the ideal.

Maggie, an elegant eleven year old tabby girl, had lived with her owner and her owner's mother since she was a

small kitten. As happens sometimes, life experiences change and sad decisions have to be made. An opportunity was presented to Maggie's owner which would require her to move to Australia. The owner's mother, told her daughter in no uncertain terms, "your cat cannot live here!" Maggie needed a new home if her owner was to pursue her career in Australia. As the time for the flight to Australia grew ever nearer, in desperation her owner contacted the CPL.

Maggie had a full veterinary check up on arrival. Her teeth were in a very bad way. All but five teeth were removed. Four days after her extractions, I collected her from the veterinarians. She appeared exhausted. She walked, quite slowly, about five steps then flopped onto the floor for a rest. Ten days after her arrival, I took her back to the veterinarian. Blood tests revealed that Maggie had a thyroid condition. Three weeks later, three more teeth were removed, so with only two teeth, her meals needed to be soft. She would need thyroid medicine for the remainder of her life.

What a girl Maggie developed into. Absolutely no one was allowed to enter her space which changed as often she chose. Even Geos, the belligerent black boy, chose to move out of her way. She earned the name of "Constable Maggie" and as the respect for her from the resident cats grew, the "Constable" was replaced by "Detective Inspector". Sadly, Maggie died a year after she had arrived but what a wonderful year she had had.

Sometimes cats develop interesting and chronic, ongoing health issues. Minty (Chapter 6), bought a friend home with him, Tucker. Tucker had originally been found in a

rubbish bin with her five kittens in the centre of Christchurch by a concerned taxi driver. The driver took the tabby and white very young Tucker to the SPCA where she and her young family were cared for. When her kittens were old enough, homes were found for them. Tucker was spayed and she also was found a home. Apparently, when she was spayed, a tiny piece of hormone producing reproductive tissue was not removed and Tucker would regularly come into a false season. The behavior included, constant padding and yowling that would continue non stop for hours. Each time Tucker came into season another home would be found for her and she would be moved on. All Tucker needed to prevent her coming into false season was a hormone replacement treatment administered the moment she showed the first loud, constant very annoying yowling signs. By the time she turned up on my doorstep with Minty, she had lived at eight addresses and had had eight names. Tucker was her ninth. She appeared to like my address very much and quickly adapted to her latest new name.

After she had been living with me for four months, her owner, a fourteen year old girl walked past my gate and spied Tucker sleeping under the shrubs inside the front fence. She re-claimed the cat she had called Muffin, took her home and shut her inside the flat where she lived with her mother and her brother. The flat was very close to my house. Tucker reluctantly went with her old owner. Things were not to go well.

When all the lights were switched off for the night in her young owners flat, Tucker began to yowl as no cat other than Tucker could. In desperation the owners opened the door and Tucker bolted over the pavement and fled

across the two streets between the flat and my house. She banged on my door and kept up her yowling until I opened my door for her then she stalked into the kitchen, had a few cat biscuits, meowed at me again then promptly jumped up on the bed she had always slept on and checked out the pillow to make sure no other cat had invaded her sleeping area. Satisfied, she curled up beside the end of the pillow and the wall and went to sleep.

Next morning on her way to school, Tucker's young owner appeared at my door. We agreed that she would collect Tucker at tea time. She could then feed Muffin/Tucker shut her inside and hope she would stay with her. Early evening, Tucker was again collected. Two hours later, having put on the same performance as the day before, a determined Tucker arrived back at my house.

The next day after a long discussion, an agreement was reached. Tucker would live her life out with me and her young owner could visit as often as she wished. Three months later the family moved away. Tucker spent five very happy and contented years with me. Funnily enough, Minty did acknowledge her each time he "visited" but he still did not stay more than a few days. Tucker was eight years old when she first arrived. She was almost fourteen years old when her kidneys failed her.

Just like humans, cats too can suffer injuries and just like humans once treatment is started it is difficult to know where to draw the line and say "no more." As research into medical intervention for feline illness and injury

increases more options are available and outcomes are not necessarily predictable. Decisions about when to terminate treatment become harder to make.

An older cat, probably tied with a rope of some kind to a tree for an unspecified length of time on the banks of the Waimakariri River, was rescued by a concerned family looking for a nice spot to eat their lunch.

The rope around his neck had caused deep welts on top of welts where it had dug deeply into his flesh. Some of the welts had appeared to have healed only to have been ripped open again and again as his struggle to free himself became more desperate. Many of the welts were infected. All the hair that would normally cover his neck and down below his shoulders had been worn away. He had managed to free himself but he was skin and bone. The caring picnickers delivered him to their veterinarian.

The veterinary nurse named the newly rescued cat, Stanley. For six weeks the staff fought Stanley's rising temperature, his malnutrition and his unstoppable infections. When progress was finally made, and the infections and his temperature were normal Stanley was de-sexed. After another month living and thriving in the veterinarian's clinic Stanley was found a new home.

That should have been the happy end to a rescued cat's story but as it turned out, it was only the beginning. Having lived on the river bank for however long, Stanley had trouble settling into a new routine and was apt to wander. A month after arriving in his new home, Stanley was run over by a car. He was discovered on one side of the road with no tail. His tail had been ripped from his body and was found on the opposite side of the road in

the gutter. His new owners were devastated. They rushed their Stanley to the emergency veterinarian. As luck would have it, the same veterinarian who had cared for him after his time on the river bank was on duty. Stanley was given a sedative for shock and kept warm overnight. The decision about what would happen next had to be made, but it could wait until the following morning. If Stanley died overnight so be it, but if he survived the night, that would be a very difficult decision to make.

The veterinarian, remembering how he and his team had fought for Stanley's life and how Stanley had endured and accepted the past treatment and all it entailed without so much as a growl, decided to operate.

Two days later Stanley was returned to his owners. His injuries were very serious and his recovery would be prolonged. At this stage he had no bowel control due to the damage around his tail. His owners were not able to provide the constant attention needed so four days later, Stanley was delivered to the SPCA to be euthanised. No one could have any feelings but sympathy for the decision Stanley's owners had to make. Again Stanley caught a lucky break. His case had been discussed by the original veterinary nurse with her SPCA contact. When Stanley arrived in the morning to be euthanised at one pm, the contact rang her friend. Her friend rang me and I agreed, sight unseen, to take over the care of poor Stanley. He was collected by the veterinary nurse and returned to the clinic.

For four days the cat huddled in the same cage he was in at the time of his rescue. Easter was approaching. The

veterinary clinic would be closed and Stanley could not be left alone. Tony and I collected the seriously injured cat. The first change was Stanley's name. He had arrived to live with us around the time we used computer names for newly arrived cats. Pixel (Chapter 2) and Geos (Chapter 3), were the others to share this dubious honour. The free Operating System, Linux, was the basis of the name bestowed on the newest addition to the household. The 'l' became a 'y' and the black and white, ten year old, medium haired cat was given the auspicious name of Lynux.

We were not given a prognosis so whether Lynux died or survived was up to Tony and me. Daily "Lynux" discussions became mandatory. He required daily doses of Clavulox, a very broad spectrum antibiotic, as well as a liquid wound repairer, Otoderm. The arrangement was that I gave Lynux all his medications and Tony gave him all the loving the cat would accept. It was warm around Easter the year he arrived. Since he was on cage rest, each day, he was carried outside into the sun. The resident cats sniffed at his cage and made his acquaintance. When the temperature began to fall, we carried him inside again. Over the first few days he was with us, he became aware he was not the only feline living with me. He had company.

By the Tuesday after Easter Lynux, who had been eating well, suddenly collapsed in the corner of his cage. He wouldn't eat, or even move. He was rushed back to the veterinarian who kept him in hospital for the next week. His antibiotics were increased and we all crossed our fingers. He struggled but slowly improved and came home. Four days later he was again back in hospital. He

could not pass urine. His bladder was distended. The veterinarian emptied Lynux's bladder, inserted a catheter so the cat could urinate and clipped an Elizabethan collar around Lynux's neck to keep him from removing the catheter. If this doesn't clear the problem, we were warned, Lynux would have to be put down.

Lynux returned home a week later. Over the next five years he did have ongoing constipation and irregular infections requiring veterinary assistance but he lived comfortably. He did have one serious bout of colitis which resulted in permanent diet changes and loads and loads of washing. He was a fast food junkie, most of the food available to him when he was living on the Waimakariri River bank was fast food. He loved chicken, probably because he had dined on Kentucky Fried throw away's so often.

He was approaching fifteen years of age when he again became unwell. Slowly Lynux began to lose weight. Blood tests, urine tests, continued daily doses of Clavulox and many examinations by his veterinarian, were all inconclusive. Lynux's weight dropped even further, his coat became sticky and he was too exhausted to preen himself. In desperation, Tony requested an X-ray. It showed white spots located on Lynux's kidneys. Cancer of his kidneys was a possible diagnosis. There was no further treatment for this courageous cat.

Lynux was happy enough in himself so his treatment now would consist of love and comfort. For the remaining days of his life, his diet would consist of boiled chicken and rice and cat biscuits, the latter a specially formulated

for cats with kidney problems and only available from the veterinarian.

Two weeks after his diagnosis, Lynux slipped into a coma. The final decision Tony could complete for his beloved friend and companion was to request Lynux's long time, caring veterinarian to end Lynux's life compassionately and quickly.

Was his rescue worth all the heartache and continued effort? When he was rolling over and over on the warm concrete showing off to Pixel (Chapter 2), his particular favourite girl cat, when he slid in between his Pixel and any other of the resident male cats lying near her, you bet it was. He had developed into a grouchy, self-satisfied, demanding Mister Lynux who adored his Tony, who in turn willingly did anything his cat demanded of him, immediately, if not sooner. Rightly or wrongly, as Lynux recovered from his many setbacks and even with the constant attention he needed, the extra five and a half years he lived were mostly enjoyed by him.

Lynux is buried in my back yard beside Sparky (Chapter 4). While the two cats were alive they would sleep back to back, sharing the one tail, Sparky's. No one who visited for the first time had any idea the two cats shared one, fluffy black tail so it seemed fitting the two black and white boys were buried back to back.

Just like medicine, veterinary science is not without the occasional misadventure. In Forrest Park in Christchurch, a young girl heard a car pull up. She glanced out the window of her bedroom in time to see a cardboard carton thrown from the door of the four wheel drive vehicle

which then sped away. Curious as to the contents of the cardboard box she investigated. Inside was a disabled tabby male cat about four years old. One leg was totally rigid and wedged upwards in the box. The young girl and her friend delivered the cat to me and an appointment was made immediately to visit the veterinarian.

The cat was given the name, Griffin. All the fur on the inside of his left leg plus most of his skin had been worn away. It appeared someone had inexpertly fastened a splint on the inside of Griffin's injured back leg. Griffin's leg was totally immobile.

There was absolutely no bend at his knee where flexibility should be so he dragged his stiff leg behind him, making escape from attacking dogs or humans impossible. An X-ray showed an even bigger disability. It appeared he had had a break above his knee before he had turned one year old. His owners had taken him to a veterinarian. He had already been neutered. He had also had surgery on his leg.

Alas the operation to mend the break had gone horribly wrong. The veterinarian had put two wires in the break. One had been inserted diagonally from the fibula into the femur; the other wire had been inserted from the tibia into the femur. The wires formed a cross. The problem was that one of the wires had been pushed too far and settled into the patella, the knee. Calcium had built up and solidified above the wires and below them fusing the knee which should have been a movable joint. The result was one useless and permanently stiff leg. Griffin's leg would always be a hindrance. Removing the calcium build up would only be a temporary measure as it would return almost as soon as it had been removed. The

difficult decision was made to amputate his leg.

After his operation, Griffin slipped easily into the household routine. He was given a regular twice daily dose of one ml of Metacam to help ease the pain he must have felt. He accepted the constant inspections from the other resident cats with dignity. When the other cats were satisfied the new boarder was no threat, as they passed Griffin they would stop, look at him then continue on their way. Griffin sat perfectly still as each cat scrutinized him and as the cat moved away, he would follow his new housemate with his very large, shiny, green eyes. After ten days, his many stitches were removed. His wound had healed perfectly. His long rehabilitation began. He would take only a very few steps then collapse exhausted. For his first three weeks, he spent his days in an enclosed cattery. He would be safe and he could begin to build up strength in his one back leg. Each night he was carried back into the house.

The decision not re-home him was made after several problems arose. He was always underfoot. He would walk in front of anyone moving about the house.

He also sat right behind ones legs, just far away not to be felt. He would walk between anyone's feet as they walked. It was felt that all those habits could lead to an owner unfamiliar with difficult behavior, to kick Griffin out of the way. If kicked or pushed, Griffin, unable to back out of the way, would fall over and possibly trip an owner up.

Griffin's favorite pastime is inspecting the fridge as soon as it is opened. He can't back away, so each time he puts his head in the fridge as he investigates the food he

might like, he has to be picked up and taken away from the fridge. Since he has only one back leg, he has to be put on the floor, back leg first, then tipped onto his front legs for his balance. He has earned the nick name "Fridge Rocket". He has his head inside the fridge almost before the door is opened.

When walking, Griffin hops but when he runs, even without one of his back legs, he is not restricted and moves smoothly. He is very fond of Annie (Chapter 10), a short-haired calico tortoiseshell. He began his interest by stalking her. Poor Annie. She couldn't eat, sleep or even attend to her ablutions without two green eyes watching her every movement. No one can whine like Annie. After several episodes of her telling him off, Griffin decided to try his charms on Gracie (Chapter 5). She was not amused and gave Griffin a hearty clip around his ear. Undeterred, he returned to stalking Annie. After two months, though Griffin is still keen, Annie has finally persuaded him that she is not. Griffin is a very healthy four year old who should have a long life ahead of him. Indeed he thinks the garden is especially for him. The catnip and catmint which flowers late November to February gives the nibbling cat a 'high'. Some prefer only one or the other. Griffin is not particular. He enjoys both.

"The wash house boys", one tabby and white, one ginger and one ginger and white, when rescued were very sick and in terrible condition through no fault of their own. Their owner lived in Linwood. She had rung the CPL a few days before Christmas, requesting the kittens be removed. My reply was "have their mother de-sexed and I will collect the kittens." The kittens were six weeks old by the time their mother was spayed. A month later a

CPL volunteer, my daughter Charon, went to collect the ten week old kittens.

The owner of the kittens had kept them in her wash house. They had no visible drink and no litter tray. Cat biscuits were all over the floor and most looked old and stale. To survive, the kittens had eaten there own faeces and drunk there own urine. With difficulty, Charon caught the three, terrified, screaming, clawing, and stinking kittens. She secured them in the holding cage. Retching with the smell, she drove to my house. She had to get rid of the smell. While she scrubbed herself under the shower, I found a dark throw for the kitten's cage. The veterinarian was the next stop for the kittens.

Trying not to retch, the veterinarian diagnosed several infections including critical gastroenteritis. Even though the kittens reeked of faeces, they could not be washed because of their extremely poor condition. Charon settled them into the spare bedroom in her house. I shopped for Incense to try and reduce the smell.

Kittens are resilient and with Charon and her daughter's constant care, these three boys began to thrive. One week after their arrival, they were given a bath and dried with a hair dryer. They were not impressed but they were clean and smelled fresh. When they were four months of age, six weeks after their arrival at Charon's, they were moved into the re-homing cattery.

They had been named Slinky, Milo and Max. Slinky developed snuffles so I collected him and bought him to my house. Milo hid and shook and was totally unapproachable. His third eye appeared and he was whisked into the CPL's veterinarian. He was diagnosed

with mouth cancer and given six months to live. Max screamed all night upsetting every other cat. I collected both cats. Charon was unaware of her rescued babies progress. When she arrived home from work, sometime after I had collected the two remaining “Washhouse Boys”, her decision was made. They would all come home and live with her. Eight years on and the three boys have developed into a pack. They are inseparable, healthy and always seen together. Sometimes, even vets make a wrong diagnosis. Milo certainly does not and has not had mouth cancer.

Sick kittens, often through no fault of their own, do not always develop into sick cats. Euthanasia is not the treatment of choice. De-sexing kittens at one kilogram or six months, which ever comes first, is. The number of cats can be restricted thus owners are not overwhelmed by the financial burden of great numbers of kittens needing care. As cat numbers dwindle, there is a greater chance that the cat will be seen as valuable and not disposable. Owning a cat is a partnership “till death us do part, in sickness and in health” and requires dependability and commitment for life.

CHAPTER NINE

KITTEN BITS AND CAT PIECES

Slinky, Patch..

Most responsible cat owners do their best for their pets. Many do not have the experience to deal with any sickness or infection that their cat may develop. Often lack of money to pay a veterinarian for medical help is not just an excuse. Everything in life costs and veterinary care can be expensive. Even if an owner can cope with the financial demands, the intensity and enormity of care that might be needed to reverse a cat's quality of life can be frighteningly overwhelming.

My grandson, an eleven year old very troubled pre-teen, was in need of guidance and discipline. A male friend of his mother's offered to take over his custody and care. My grandson moved into the semi-rural home with the friend and his cat. Life staggered on.

The cat, a black, part oriental, friendly un-spayed girl about a year old produced five kittens. When the kittens were three weeks old my son, Tony, visited. He could see something was wrong with all the kittens and their mother, and suggested a visit to the nearest veterinarian. The cat's owner assured Tony he would visit a veterinarian. A week later and no veterinarian visit in sight, Tony offered to transfer the care of the six, sick cats to me. Tony would pay all costs. It was the cost of treatment that had been the obstacle for veterinary care. Two days later on the weekend, the family of six, all squashed into a cardboard carrying box, were delivered

to me.

The box was carried into a safe and secure room and the top opened. Six pairs of eyes looked up at me. Every kitten and their mother had dried, raised, wrinkled, hairless lumps all over their bodies. The bare patches were on their backs, their haunches, their tummies, their tails, their shoulders, their ears and faces.

They all had the worst dose of ringworm I had ever seen. My diagnosis was confirmed on Monday when they all visited my veterinarian. They were scanned from head to toe, top and underneath with a blue light to confirm the diagnosis and to identify the extent of the infection. Grisovet was prescribed, one dose per day for twenty eight days. Within ten days the unsightly, bare lumps began to disappear and the fur began to grow back. By the time the full dose of Grisovet had been administered, all but two kittens were clear of infection. The other two, one boy and one girl kitten had a further two weeks of daily medication before the blue light also cleared them of any lingering ringworm. All the kittens were found a new home. Mother cat was spayed and still lives with her owner. He had put his hand up to help my grandson when he needed it. The least I could do was to help sort out his cats.

Ringworm is difficult to treat. It requires daily medication and a strict hygiene regime to prevent cross infection to non affected cats and people, so it is time consuming to deliver the needed care. It is not a death sentence.

A disturbing letter to the editor was printed in the Christchurch Star which suggested otherwise. The writer claimed to belong to a group of volunteers calling

themselves Cats Unloved. They formed because they decided Christchurch needed another group to manage the growing number of stray and abandoned kittens and cats. The letter writer detailed a day in the life of the seven, small, abandoned kittens entrusted to her care by the concerned person who found them. All the kittens had ringworm. The writer, instead of seeking treatment in her ignorance killed them all. Most abandoned cats and kittens need medical treatment and almost always a correct diet. That the seven kittens paid the ultimate price for the lack of experience of the letter writer was tragic.

Sometimes kittens survive against all the odds. A house owner living opposite the side entrance into Burwood Hospital heard crying coming from under her house. Her partner wriggled underneath the floor of the house to investigate.

He carefully secured the two very small tabby and white kittens, one girl and one boy. The CPL was contacted and I collected the two, desperately sick five week old kittens.

"I don't know what to do for them," their rescuer said. "They won't eat, they just cry." The kittens were filthy. Their many infections were oozing pus and blood, causing their fur to stick together in lumps. They had conjunctivitis and Calicivirus. The wee girl's, eyes were completely stuck tightly closed while one of the wee boys eyes was also jammed shut. Both kittens had a mouth full of ulcers making eating and drinking very painful. An emergency visit to my trusty veterinarian and after a careful examination they were prescribed drops for their eyes and antibiotics for their many infections. I suggested he name the two waifs. He suggested Slinky for the girl

and Patch for the boy. He wished me good luck and I took them home not knowing if they would survive.

Patch was able to eat without assistance so he was given special kitten food supplied by the veterinarian, mixed with warm water. Slinky was as determined not to eat, as I was that she would. I mixed the food to a consistency that would slide through a syringe and fed Slinky a drop at a time. She would not open her mouth so I dripped food between her teeth. Over the following four hours they each had three small, warm feeds.

Between each meal the kittens were laid on top of the electric blanket on my bed. Cold is the main killer of both cats and kittens, so it was imperative to keep these two wee fighters as warm as possible. After their third meal they were put on a warmed blanket which lay on top of two hot water bottles which were in a small cane basket in a holding cage. The cage was totally covered with a woolen blanket to keep inside as much warmth as possible. I went to bed with my fingers crossed.

In the morning when Tony, who has his own flatette at the rear of my garage, came inside the house to make our breakfast toast, he asked, "How are they?" "I'm too scared to look," I said so he replied, "I will." He crept into the room where the cage was and literally shouted "They are sitting up in the basket expectantly."

Of course their breakfast came first and we both ate cold toast. Daily the improvement was unmistakable. After only two days being fed with a syringe, Slinky began gobbling her food from a saucer. Four days later, both

kittens could see their surroundings out of both their eyes. After a week in my care they visited the veterinarian for a check up. Amazed at Patch and Slinky's improvement he said twice, "Well done! Well done!"

The two kittens continued to improve. They were vaccinated when they were three months old and de-sexed at five months. Patch now lives with a family and three children. He greets them each day as they return from school. Slinky lives with a mother and daughter, and is one of three cat "children".

How these two tabby and white kittens finished up under the house opposite Burwood Hospital remains a mystery. A forest had been growing behind the Hospital for many years and was finally cut down to be developed into housing estate. The forest had been the home of many stray and abandoned cats. It is possible that Patch and Slinky were born in the forest and their mother had moved them to safety for some reason. She may have moved two of her litter, Slinky and Patch, across busy Burwood Road, and settled them under the house while she returned to the forest to collect another kitten. She may never have made the return trip successfully. Life is hard for stray and abandoned cats and kittens.

Some do have it better than others. Rescuers come in all shapes and sizes and are not always what one expects them to be.

An elderly lady living in a house backing onto a car park discovered a small female cat, thrown over her six foot fence. She fed it; the cat developed into a healthy adult

and had three kittens. The elderly lady's back yard was heaven for any cat. It had huge silver birch trees growing closely together, filling most of the back yard. Underneath the trees was grass at least a metre high. A six foot high tin fence surrounded the yard. There were several small broken down enclosures, like old chicken runs. One stored her winter wood supply and the other two sheds were filled with whatever she had collected on her daily bike ride, along with empty cartons, tins, newspapers and even a cat cage.

The three kittens, two black and one grey, developed well but had almost no contact with any human. The elderly lady bought the mother cat her favourite chicken dinner. When the kittens were four months old, the lady wanted them caught. She also wanted the mother cat caught and spayed. She was prepared to pay the cost of spaying and wanted the cat returned to her care. What a job it was to catch the poorly socialised family.

With my daughters help we blocked up all the holes in one of the sheds then herded two of the kittens, one at a time, into the shed. The carrying cages we had bought with us were set down near the shed's entrance. Our aim was to steer the kittens, again one at a time, towards the opening of the shed where it would be cornered, hopefully able to be grabbed and popped into the carrying cage. As we caught one kitten, it was put into one of the cages and the lid closed and secured. We caught two of the kittens but the third having observed the exercise, shot under the fence and disappeared.

The next step was for the elderly lady to secure the third kitten in her bathroom making sure the bathroom door

was firmly closed, and call me. Four days later number three kitten was safely with its siblings being socialised by a very experienced CPL volunteer. The mother was still at large. Without capturing and spaying her, more kittens would be born and the problem would begin again.

A trap was set. After a week of catching three cats, all different, and one hedgehog, the lady was persuaded to entice the mother cat into her bathroom as she had done with the kitten. She had no telephone so the plan was she would secure the cat, tell her neighbour, who would then ring me. Within days the plan was successful. The cat was secured in the bathroom. The bathroom was filled with stacks of empty egg cartons, more boxes, towels, and a cupboard that took up half the room space. The bath was along one wall, and the hand basin was full of underwear waiting to be washed. For twenty minutes the terrified cat darted under and over everything. Its breathing became more ragged as it became more scared. Finally it ran straight up the high bathroom wall at the back of the bath. As it came down towards the floor I grabbed it, put it into the carrying cage, shut the lid and closed the catches. The cat was delivered to the veterinarian who spayed her using dissolving stitches to close the wound. The poor wee cat did not eat, drink or sleep while "in captivity," so after three days, for her own peace, she was delivered back to her owner.

The cat's favorite dish, cooked chicken, was again bought especially for her. The elderly lady was thrilled to have her cat returned to her spayed, safe even if still very scared. She lifted the lid off the carrying cage and the cat shot out into the kitchen then up the chimney, down into the empty fire place then out the back door. Much later

the cat arrived back in the kitchen and scoffed the chicken. The elderly lady was undoubtedly eccentric in her personal behavior. When it came to the cat, who was originally thrust on her, she acted with compassion, her eccentricities did not overwhelm her desire to have the kittens cared for or the mother cat spayed. She was prepared to accept the total responsibility for the dumped cat and her kittens so the cycle would be broken.

Less than a kilometre away from the elderly lady's property was another house sitting in surroundings that encouraged every cat to visit. The grass was very long, the trees had never been pruned and, instead of broken down sheds there were several derelict vehicles. A black and white cat had appeared, checked out the "living areas" and finding them to her satisfaction had decided to move in.

The young man living in the house fed her and weeks later, she produced four kittens, three tabby's, one boy and two girls, and a black and white girl. As the kittens grew, he fed them too. The whole cat family lived in the long grass or under one of the many vehicles. Very little contact was had between human and cat.

When the kittens were five months old, the young man realised if he didn't de-sex the kittens and the mother cat, his population of five would rapidly increase. He contacted the CPL. Carrying a trapping cage, I visited his house. Within an hour, three of the kittens, all the tabbies, had been trapped, and delivered to the veterinarian for de-sexing the next day. Though the fourth kitten was very interested in the food on the hook in the trapping cage, and she walked around and around the cage, she refused to enter it. Knowing the kitten and

the mother had to be caught and de-sexed, the cage was left at the property to be set regularly. Six months later, the young man caught the fourth kitten. She was pregnant with four kittens. The kittens were aborted; she was spayed and returned to her home.

Meanwhile four more kittens were produced by the original mother cat. They were approximately six weeks old when they began exploring their living space and therefore again came to the notice of the young man. He had paid for the four kittens to be de-sexed. Neither the mother cat nor the kittens were his in the first place. Now there were four more kittens and a defiant mother who would not be trapped. A different trapping cage was called for, a treadle cage.

The treadle cage has a flat piece of tin sitting on a spring. Food is put on the trap's floor at the end of the cage past the treadle. To get to the food, the cat has to walk over the piece of flat tin, the treadle. A wire is hooked from the tin on the cage floor to the door. One step onto the treadle and the trap door shuts trapping the unsuspecting cat inside the cage. All four kittens were quickly caught and delivered to a volunteer whose first job was to socialise them.

The four kittens attacked, spat and growled at any human attention.

No one would give a home to a kitten who would sink its claws into its owner at will. The volunteer tamed the "lions" and the CPL found them homes.

The final success was the capture of their mother. She was spayed and returned to the young man's address to

live her life in peace with her first four kittens. The family of five would make sure no more cats ever entered the property. Cats are very territorial. They do not allow trespassers on their property and would be trespassers quickly move on.

Age catches up with all of us and many times the cats suffer. Pet owners always think they will outlive their pets and fail to make provisions for them. An elderly man lived in a pre-nineteen hundred cottage in Papanui. The property had been in his family for many years. As he became less able to mow lawns and grow vegetables, his large back yard became overgrown. Another haven for dumped cats was developing. A female cat appeared, producing kittens not long after she arrived. The house owner fed her. Her kittens grew and had more kittens who had more kittens. The owner continued to feed all the cats in his ever growing colony. When he died none of the family wanted anything to do with the many cats, they wanted a quick sale of the property. All the cats and kittens were exterminated. The cruel irony is that most of the kittens would have been fathered by the un-neutered pet cats living in the houses close by, the ones with the mown lawns and the pruned trees. If only all cat owners had both their male and female cats de-sexed, such murderous cruelty could be avoided.

When an old lady who had "lived like a recluse," according to her neighbour died, she left behind her two, elderly cats. The old lady appeared to have no family so the CPL was contacted by the neighbour. The two cats had lived in seclusion in an overgrown property with very little human contact. The cats were trapped and taken to a CPL cattery where each cat was given its own cage.

One of the cats jammed herself into the far corner of the cage, the other hid under a blanket. After a week, neither cat had moved. They neither ate nor drank. They hid and shivered violently at any human contact. It is unlikely that anyone would take on two elderly emotionally troubled cats. Sadly euthanasia was the only humane option for them.

There are always exceptions. Some folk are well aware of what must be done to safe guard the ongoing care of their pet. On one of my regular visits to the local supermarket, in the cat food aisle, I felt a light tap on my arm. A quiet voice asked me, "Excuse me. What do I feed a cat with?"

A concerned elderly lady, Nancy, explained a cat had turned up at her house two months previously. Each morning, Nancy threw bread out on her lawn, for the birds. In the afternoon she scattered leftovers on her lawn, again for the birds. A small black cat appeared each morning and afternoon, ate the bread and leftovers then disappeared. Nancy decided the cat needed proper food but not having any knowledge of cats, she asked me for help. She purchased two tins of cat food and a packet of cat biscuits.

I asked if she would like help to catch the cat, have it de-sexed and finally, re-home it with the help of the CPL. She agreed the cat needed a home. She assured me the cat was very friendly and so easy to catch. I arranged to loan her a secure cat holding cage, one with a strong wire top, sides and a heavy plastic floor, to secure the cat. Two catches, one each end of the wire top of the cage, would be sprung to make sure the enclosed cat

would not escape.

I dropped the cage at her house, gave her my telephone number, and suggested when she had secured the cat, to contact me. I would collect the cat and take it to the CPL's veterinarian. Nancy was most appreciative of my help but she insisted on delivering the cat to my door. She lived only two blocks away from my address and though she was almost blind, she was determined to deliver the cat. She had a small trolley. She would secure the cat inside the cage I had loaned her, lift it onto her trolley and push it to my place. The trolley had a handle to make moving the cage possible.

On her way down the footpath the cage slipped forward off the trolley and onto the pavement. Fortunately, the cat was well secured inside the cage so was unable to escape. The mishap was witnessed by a woman who had just collected her children from school. She loaded Nancy, the cat and her trolley into her car. Once delivered to my gate, the woman and her children helped Nancy up my drive and made sure I was available to receive the very serene, black and white, two year old cat.

Son Tony drove Nancy home and I settled the cat into my cattery. When I lifted her out of the cage, and before I let her walk away from me, I turned her around in a full circle. She had several teats, she'd had kittens. There was fur around her teats and it was dry. Young kittens would have left a circle of dry skin where they would have sucked off the fur. I guessed the kittens were older and only needed the odd drink. The kittens needed to be caught. To catch them they needed to be found.

The first step was to return the mother cat back to an amazed Nancy. "Well I never," she exclaimed over and over, "and I thought it was a boy." I gave her more food and careful instructions how to catch the kittens. Cat food was to be left out for the mother cat so she would not have to survive on bread and leftovers. Two days later Nancy rang and reported two of the kittens had turned up but they were under her house. It is very difficult to entice cats out from under a house when they have decided they are safe from humans. The next step was to regularly offer food in the same place where the kittens could find it. Nancy had a small shed on her property so I suggested she left food inside the shed morning and afternoon. When she was sure the kittens and mother were out from underneath her house, she was to block up the entrance the wee family was using. That would move the kittens to the shed where the door could be secured while the kittens were eating.

Ten days later, the then president of the CPL, Susanne, arrived with a trapping cage and with difficulty and many scratches, secured the cat and her kittens. The complete family was delivered to the CPL's veterinarian.

After the obligatory worming, de-fleaing, vaccinating and de-sexing, all were found new homes. Nancy was eighty two years old and almost blind but she took the time and put in the effort to rescue the feline family that no one else in the direct area could be bothered with. Nancy showed a great capacity for kindness which restored my faith in humanity somewhat. Tragically, Nancy was hit by a car and killed only weeks after her monumental effort to rescue the small family whom she could not bare to ignore.

No matter whether it is lack of finances or experience which leads to the neglect of cats and kittens or their abandonment or wholesale slaughter, there is always an easier answer to prevent the huge amount of suffering cats and their offspring are compelled to endure. The Council must make de-sexing of all cats, male and female, compulsory and to regularly police the new law. Dog ownership is controlled, why not cat ownership?

CHAPTER 10

CAT NEEDS HUMAN WANTS

Squeak, Annie, Marsha, Pepe, Rufus, Jetson and many, many more....

Cats are self reliant creatures and to a large extent self sufficient. They can meet most of their needs quite nicely without humans. Most humans want a cat to sit on their lap, purr on demand, come when they are called, eat whatever is dished up at a time suitable to the owner, and disappear when the owner does not want their company and to cause no extra work. Even the ideal cat cannot live up to these unrealistic expectations.

Once a cat is owned, if one can ever own a cat, it becomes dependent on its owner for food. Some owner's decide one meal of the same food a day is enough for their cat even though they themselves eat a variety of food several times a day. It is more reasonable to feed the cat a variety of food twice a day. Cats are grazers. They will eat all day if they are constantly offered food. To regulate their eating habits, and prevent huge weight gain, their food should be offered at the same time each day and in the same place. Cats should never be fed near their litter trays. After all, what human eats their meals in the toilet?

When the cat is kept inside a house, a litter tray must be provided for its use. Cats much prefer to complete their ablutions outside and away from any human scrutiny. If the cat is ill, has moved house or just shut inside, a litter tray needs to be provided to avoid messy accidents. Cats

often won't use a litter tray if it is not kept clean.

Cats have the ability to “clothe” themselves for the weather conditions. Those cats who live outside in all weathers be it rain, hail, sleet or snow, develop thick, stiff coats unlike the “heater huggers” who live in homes where both cat and humans luxuriate in constant warmth. Their coats are thick in the winter and soft and silky in the summer.

Not all cats like to be picked up. The safest way to pick up a wriggling or angry cat is by sliding your left hand underneath the cat's front legs and putting your right hand firmly over the cat's shoulders just behind its neck. If you push up from underneath and down from the top, the cat is secured between your forearms. Held in this way, almost all cats will cease to struggle immediately and the owner is less likely to be clawed.

Like humans, cats need regularity and security. Routine is their middle name. As long as the household cat is fed close to the same time each day and is made to spend its nights safely inside the house, it will abide by the house rules. The very young felines will push the boundaries. They demand meals all through the night, meow loudly night and day for attention, scratch the furniture, grab at the owners legs and insist the door to outside is opened several times a day for them to come in then go out then come in again. Most cats become quiet, uncomplicated, obliging pets at around eight years of age. The superior eight year plus cat will ignore most humans and visitors, sleep with one eye open and quietly watch everything and everyone. Eight+ year old cats are excellent additions to a household.

Cats are very good at self preservation and when the need arises they will act to escape that which threatens them. A neighbour had been feeding a cat in the house next to his. The owner had moved away and as so often happens, had left the cat to fend for itself. The neighbour contacted the CPL's veterinarian and was advised to borrow one of their cages, at no cost, to secure and transport the cat safely back to the vet. The advice was ignored. The neighbour caught the cat, put it in the boot of his very old car, and slammed the door into place. He drove to the veterinarian. It was an absolute impossibility to secure the cat when the boot lid was raised. The terrified cat flew out of the boot, dashed across the busy road and disappeared.

The end result would have been so different if the neighbour had listened to the expert advice given to him. A fundamental rule of moving a cat from one place to another is never transport an unrestrained, unsecured cat.

Humans see cats as fulfilling the need of a loving companion and they forget the cat might not be of an age or temperament to fill that role. Members of a family will sometimes present an elderly family member with a very young cat for company. Their intentions are commendable but the outcome can be unsatisfactory. One elderly lady received a kitten from her grand daughter for Christmas. After the wee thing had tripped the new owner several times, she contacted the CPL. The kitten was duly collected by me and re-homed.

Another family gave their mother a very young cat a year

before she was given a terminal diagnosis. Though the family had several members, all of them had reasons why they could not possibly take responsibility for the cat they had presented to their mother the previous year.

Not always are the families at fault. Squeak, an eight year old tortoiseshell and white girl was left behind when her owners moved away from their house in Hornby. She was welcomed into the house of an elderly couple next door. Three blissful years for Squeak followed. Then, very suddenly, one of Squeak's new owners became ill and died. Her husband did his best but when he also became sick his adult children settled Squeak into a veterinary clinic. She would be safe and cared for in her owner's absence when his health improved he returned to his home and Squeak was returned to him. Less than a year later, finding life without his wife unmanageable, he chose to move permanently into an elderly care facility. Squeak, now eleven years of age, found her self again in the veterinary clinic. Neither of the adult children were able to include Squeak into their home. As a friend of the family, I was asked to take Squeak. Poor Squeak! She spent the first week in my cattery along with eight others having lived in a house as the only cat. Moving in with eight other cats in an open cattery must have been very stressful for her. The first night she hid in a wooden cage which was boarded on all sides and the top and the bottom. Squeak huddled on blankets on the floor of the cage, ate her tea then found the darkest corner in which to hide. By her third day in her new home, she ventured out into the cattery space and met the eight residents. She realised she had nothing to fear, that no cat posed a threat to her. She investigated the cattery area and chose the place where she wished to eat her meals. She

was one of the few cats coming into my care that had no social or behaviour problems. Squeak was a pleasure to cuddle. She purred non stop. She may have been another elderly cat desperate for a home, but although I was her last resort, what a delightful “Oldie” she turned out to be. One month after her arrival, I moved her from the cattery to my home.

Few cats will enter a new home and settle right in as if they belonged.

Most will take several days to become comfortable with the sounds of the house and the humans, the routine, when food is available and where the water bowl is. Cats, like humans, rarely arrive and immediately sit down to tea. When Squeak was introduced into the house she found herself another safe place, in the bottom of a tallboy that had had the drawers removed and soft bedding added for her comfort. Slowly she observed yet another routine of the house as she worked out the rules and the hierarchy. All cat colonies whether the cats are stray in groups, feral or totally domesticated, have an order of seniority. There is always a boss.

Squeak was eleven years of age when she needed someone to care for her. Unfortunately, very few humans are prepared to invite an elderly cat into their homes. Quite often elderly cats require veterinary care, some of which can be costly. Too often cats are euthanised when they are ten years old as new homes are hard to find. Many ten year old cats are perfectly healthy but like elderly humans, too often no one cares.

One of the most common human needs is to have the correct colour cat. Brindle tortoiseshell cats have

amazing coats. Most are a fusion of black, ginger, and several shades of brown, mixed together and spread all over the cat's body. Sometimes nature will add splotches of white on their paws or chest.

No one wants them.

All tortoiseshells, be they brindle like Poppy (Chapter 7), cream like Mitzi (Chapter 5) or calico like Annie, below, have earned the nickname 'haughty Torties.'

They are willful. They will bite and scratch without warning. They will purr without being stroked. They will climb on any offered lap, pad and purr in ecstasy, or nip and bite because they want to. They will stare unblinkingly when they are expected to obey and then stalk off. Tortoiseshell cats will always follow their own rules. They certainly do not conform to the type of cat humans desire.

A South American family chose a calico tortoiseshell kitten when she was only weeks old. They followed all the right expectations required by the CPL. The kitten was spayed at six months of age, she was wormed, flead and vaccinated each year. She was named Annie. When Annie was five years old, the family returned to South America and she was returned to the CPL for re-homing. Annie was settled into her own pen along with a bowl of water and a litter tray and given her evening meal. She huddled in the corner of her pen attempting to push herself through the wall, constantly trying to hide her head underneath her body when approached.

For several days neither her breakfast nor her dinner was touched. Cats often refuse to eat, sometimes for days when their usual routine is changed. Annie also shook as

if terrified and constantly screamed. Dainty and beautifully coloured with orange, brown and black patches down the length of her back, a small black splotch at the end of her nose, a half black, half ginger chin with short white fur completing her coat, Annie was beautiful and totally un-homeable. Over the weeks that followed, Annie was moved from the re-homing cattery to the CPL's veterinary clinic. She had stopped trying to push herself through the back of the cage but she continued to scream each time she was approached. When I was asked to take Annie home, how could I say no?

She was introduced into my open plan cattery. Eight sociable cats were currently in residence, waiting their turn to move into the CPL re-homing cattery. Again she jammed herself into a corner and repeated her bizarre screaming and shaking behaviour each time she was approached.

Each meal time Annie was stroked, cuddled and whispered to, whether she liked it or not. If no human paid her any attention she would sit perfectly still and watch the reactions around her. Slowly her screams became quieter and of shorter duration and her shaking eventually ceased. She didn't attempt to turn herself inside out in the nearest corner and she began to enjoy her meals but only if no one was looking. The other cats, sensing her terror, left her alone. After eight months of constant attention, Annie was confident enough to be let out of the cattery. With my fingers crossed, and hoping I had made the right decision, I opened the door and hoped Annie would return for her dinner. She did.

For the first four weeks, Annie prowled along the top of the fence following me as I hung out the washing or weeded the garden. She sneaked inside the house and requested a special meal and individual attention. Six weeks after her release from the cattery, she disappeared for twenty four hours. When she arrived home she was very vocal, very hungry and very tired. Two weeks later she disappeared for two and a half worrying days. Her reappearance was most welcome. She meowed loudly for several minutes. I'm sure she was informing me of her adventures. Annie has lived with me for six years. She is fastidiously clean and remains very vocal especially on arriving home from her daily wanders. With time and patience she has developed into a very sociable and friendly cat.

Cats might be self reliant but they do like company. Two cats per household are better than one, they keep each other company and both greet their human together. They are less likely to roam too far since they already have company but as happens in all relationships not every cat gets on with every other cat.

Marsha, a four year old black and white confident sociable go-getter lived with residents of the Richmond Fellowship in New Brighton. Her job was to assist the residents to learn responsibility. They were to look after her welfare, feed her regularly and in return she would interact with them. She certainly did not want for attention. A very large ginger male cat, also a resident of the Fellowship and an aggressive bully, took great delight in pushing Marsha away from her food and eating it himself. Older than Marsha and therefore the boss, he made Marsha wait for her food and allowed her to eat

only what he decided to leave her.

For her sake the manager of the Fellowship house asked the CPL for help. Marsha was delivered to me. She was a very likeable, uncomplicated and friendly cat. A few days after her delivery to me she was moved to the re-homing cattery. A few more days passed and someone came in search of a companion. Cats are generally astute and pick their owner rather than the other way round. Marsha pranced up to the prospective owner and purred "take me home." It was love at first sight. Marsha had chosen her new owner.

Some prospective owners want the impossible. They want to deny the cat it's innate nature. A woman, answering an advertisement to re-home an eight year old cat, demanded he never chase or catch birds. "I love my birds," she told me. She told me she feeds her birds and her cats together. They are fed at opposite ends of a large enclosed cage. She said the cats she currently had show no interest in the birds. It turned out the cats were very young kittens who were yet to learn and hone their hunting skills. The eight year old would not have been so passive.

Some demand a moral impossibility of those who care for cats. A woman wanted to give an ordinary moggie a home. Did she have any specific requirements? Yes she wanted to offer a home to a non de-sexed female stray. She had two very elderly, un-neutered male cats. Their life expectancy was obviously short, she wanted a young, un-spayed female to breed with her two elderly males. She assured me she would not over breed the young moggie.

I shuddered as I envisaged two very elderly males having sex with an underage female to produce offspring for the woman's benefit. Perhaps she should have her two male cats embalmed if she can't live without them. Needless to say she was not offered one of my "girls."

Three cats chose me as their owner. Pepe, Dave (Chapter 5), then Rufus turned up over a period of eighteen months. Pepe was the first to watch the resident cats from the neighbours iron garage roof. He slowly made his way down from the roof onto a metre high fence in my back yard, across the lawn, onto the cattery roof then onto my garage roof. Most nights at dusk he would arrive on the edge of my garage roof and watch. His first meals were slid on to the edge of the garage roof and when he began to turn up for his food each night I began to put his tea on a rubbish drum, closer to the ground. As he became more confident and accepting of my presence I was able to pick him up. As I lowered him into a carrying cage I had a good look at him.

He appeared to be quite young, not much older than a year. His long black fur was matted and his eyes were weeping pus. Even though he had regularly been fed on the roof, he was still very thin and very hungry. The first step on his way to health was a visit to the veterinarian. He was neutered and treated for worms and fleas. Antibiotics were prescribed for his very sore eyes. I kept him in the cattery, in an enclosed section and on his own, for ten days, fed him, medicated him and he bounced back. When his antibiotics were completed, he was vaccinated. He quickly gained weight, introduced himself to the residents and was made aware of the hierarchy by none other than Geos (Chapter 3). Pepe was fifteen

months of age when he arrived needing help. As he became secure in himself he became a regular smarty pants. A typical teen. He will start a fight if he thinks he can get away with it. Most of the other cats ignore his approaches so he gives up trying to hassle them.

Dave had been residing with me for about three months when Rufus began to appear, usually at dusk. Mainly because of the large, black blotch on his nose which spreads out over one side of his face, Rufus had to be the ugliest black and white cat I have ever made an acquaintance with. At first he watched from the neighbours place, looked over the fence, and watched as my many cats arrived for their tea. I prepared him a meal and held it up for him to see. I placed it on an outside shelf and left. He made his way across the neighbour's garage roof, down onto the dividing fence, into the garden then, when no one was in sight, over the grass to where his food was.

Rufus was in very poor condition. He had a huge head, quite out of proportion to the rest of his body. His eyes were bleeding where he'd been fighting and the wounds had not healed. His bones could be counted as they protruded through his fur and his rear end was so weak and emaciated that he swung from side to side as he walked. The first priority was to feed him. Cats as muscle wasted as Rufus, respond quickly to regular food and they are smart enough to return for a meal when they are aware it is provided for them.

Rufus took four months making his way, earlier and earlier each night, to his special place to eat. Amazingly when I made the first attempt to pick him up, he enjoyed

the contact. One week after his first cuddle he was captured in a carrying cage, settled into the cattery and, at the first opportunity, taken to the veterinarian for the obligatory de-sexing and vaccinating.

As Rufus continued to flourish so did his attitude. The house rules are all cats will stay inside the house from dusk to dawn. Night time is the most dangerous for cats. They are by their very nature nocturnal, so to demand they stay inside the house at night when they love prowling everywhere and anywhere, is a behaviour they have to learn. Cats are very territorial. They will protect their property and they will fight to keep other cats away. Rufus decided the house was his property and he was going to scrap with the long term residents to prove it, usually in the evening. He had to learn his place.

He was given time out in the bathroom with the door firmly closed when he started fights. Slowly, after many nights sleeping on the lino floor in front of the washing machine, he got the message. Fighting is not allowed. All it takes to change a cats behavior is time, patience and consistency. It can take weeks, months or as in the case of Billy (Chapter 5), more than a year.

The three boys, Dave, Pepe and Rufus were all wary but domesticated. Whether their previous owners moved addresses, did not want them anymore or went overseas, is any ones guess. They were left to fend for themselves. Unfortunately human responsibility often does not extend to their pets. Thankfully they all found my garden, regular food and plenty of warm snow fleece blankets to their liking.

Jetson made his appearance over a twelve month period

and still he is not comfortable staying inside the house over night. He is yet another medium haired black and white boy which makes me wonder if he and Pepe have the same genes. The first time I managed to secure him, he was neutered, vaccinated and treated for conjunctivitis with Conoptol cream. The treatment continued for ten days after his surgery and the problem, which had plagued him for months, was readily cured.

Sometimes, however much a human wants to give a stray cat a home, the cat might not want the same outcome. Jetson has been treated for worms and fleas and he is de-sexed. Food is available at any time he visits. Occasionally when it is very cold, he allows me to pick him up and take him inside the house in the warm. Most of the time he prefers to live outside. Cats grow a thick coat for extra warmth in the winter and warm bedding is provided in sheltered spots around my property for all those felines who will never sleep inside. Having been de-sexed Jetson is less likely to fight, minimizing his chances of being infected with FIV from a possibly infected opponent.

Five months after Jetson was de-sexed, he decided that living in my house with the many resident cats and having to obey my rules was acceptable. One month he changed his mind. He wants no human contact but is happy to be fed. Though I would like him to be a permanent inside resident, he has chosen the level of human contact he wants.

While cats are largely self reliant, once they have been owned and have had their needs met by humans, it is unfair and cruel to abandon them. At last a Bill has been

passed into New Zealand Law protecting the rights of animals, including the rights of the cat. Some of the definitions and recommendations are:

A companion cat is a common domestic cat or kitten that lives with humans as a companion and is dependent on humans for its welfare.

To prevent unplanned breeding, cats should be de-sexed.

Kittens ideally should not be removed from their mothers before ten weeks of age and preferably twelve weeks except where they have been orphaned.

Cats showing signs of chronic pain, suffering and distress, injury, or deteriorating health must receive veterinary attention.

It is an offence under the Act to abandon a cat. An obligation exists for the owner or person in charge to pass the cat into the care of a responsible person or animal welfare shelter.

Cats or kittens must not be killed by drowning.

The Animal Welfare Act of 1999 allows for fines of up to \$50,000 and/or sentences of up to three years in jail for cases of cruelty to animals.

Enforcing the Act, will encourage owners to take responsibility for a small life, any pet but; definitely a cat.

CHAPTER 11

PRICELESS VOLUNTEERS

Marvin, Tibby, Scotty, plus ...

Voluntary organisations depend on the goodwill and dedication of the volunteers who selflessly give their time and considerable effort. The Cats Protection League, CPL, is no different. The CPL opportunity shop is totally operated by such volunteers. Without their efforts, the regular funding needed to de-sex, medicate and keep in safe care the many sick and injured stray cats in their care would be impossible to accomplish. The public generously donate saleable goods which are sorted into categories, such as clothing, kitchenware and china. All goods sold help to finance the ongoing welfare of the never ending amount of stray and abandoned cats. The floor of the shop has to be vacuumed, shelves and the china on them need cleaning, clothes need folding, books and magazines need sorting, shop windows need cleaning and morning and afternoon tea needs serving. The volunteers do it all for the cats.

The office is served by a paid employee as is the management of the CPL's cattery. The bulk of the work is done by volunteers. Each cat residing in the cattery, has its own litter tray. Sawdust is used on the bottom of each litter tray for the cats to cover their waste. Imagine emptying and cleaning forty litter trays every day, once in the morning and again in the evening. In the Cattery, each cat has its own cubicle which is swept daily. The cats bedding is washed often and changed regularly. All surfaces are cleaned daily and all cats are fed twice a

day. The volunteers who give their time are totally dedicated.

The Palace is part of the re-homing cattery, which exclusively houses kittens from three months to eight months of age, the so called teenagers. Teenage kittens cause havoc as they speed after each other, climb the wire netting that encloses The Palace and pull apart anything they can get their claws into. Tidying their living space and clearing up and refilling their up-turned litter trays, can be frustrating.

The CPL cattery and The Palace house the well cats and kittens to be re-homed. Those volunteers who choose to foster the many stray cats and kittens, some needing intensive care, and who keep the cats in their homes, commit to twenty four hour care of their charges. Although the CPL does its best to provide the necessary food and pay for all veterinary care, the fosterer often meets any shortfall. For instance, if a fosterer has cats and kittens in her care and has only been supplied adult cat food, kitten food must be purchased as a necessary extra. Kittens should not eat adult cat food. The same applies to the dry biscuits given to kittens. Giving incorrect or poor quality food to cats and kittens could result in diarrhea, dehydration and a very sick pet.

Kittens need to be kept occupied to prevent them ripping, with their very sharp claws anything they can pull, bite or tear. Ping-pong balls, newspaper, anything tied and hanging or rolling and rattling help to entertain the four legged, mischievous bundles of fur.

Volunteer dedication and expertise is priceless. When information is desperately needed by a concerned

human with a stray or injured cat, the volunteer is there. Marvin, a stately name given to the stray ginger cat that appeared on a Marine Parade property, was skin and bone. His fur was greasy and hanging in lumpy tufts and one of his eyes was discharging thick lumps of yellow pus. The property owner contacted the CPL and was loaned a trapping cage to catch Marvin. The cage was made of heavy wire and had a hook hanging down three quarters of the length of the cage, towards the rear. Meat was firmly attached to the hook with the assumption that when the cat entered the cage and pulled at the meat, the trap door would slam shut behind the cat. Clever Marvin pulled at the meat and managed to race out of the cage just before it slammed shut behind him.

The property owners own cat was also clever. She worked out that to help herself to an extra meal of fresh steak, all she had to do was hook the meat, secured on the cages hook, towards the side of the cage and chew it off.

As Marvin's health deteriorated the concerned property owner became desperate to help the poor, stray, sick ginger boy. She contacted the closest veterinary clinic. The nurse contacted me. A treadle cage, described in Chapter 9, was loaned to the property owner. Marvin's owner was given explicit directions for its successful use. A plate of meat was to be left at the end of the cage past the aluminium tread plate on the floor of the cage. When the cat slunk into the cage after the meat, he had to cross the aluminium plate and the door would shut, locking him inside.

Marvin was quickly trapped and delivered to the veterinarian where he was de-sexed, vaccinated and his

injured eye operated on. An FIV test proved positive. His age was put at about three. His life expectancy with FIV would be a further three to five years. He was returned to the very caring property owner where he will live the remainder of his life, however long that may be, in comfort. Marvin is a very lucky cat. He had chosen his human and his human had a heart.

Often elderly cats, owned by elderly humans who can no longer look after themselves let alone remember to feed their long time companion, need someone to care for them in their twilight years. Surely a twelve year old cat who has the expectancy of another four years, maybe more, is entitled to live out all of its life. Advancements in veterinary care means most cats will live longer.

Tibby, at fifteen years, had lived with her human all her life. When her human became unable to look after herself or Tibby, and as she refused to live in care, Tibby's welfare became a concern to the owner's family. Tibby was removed to a cattery where she resided for several months. As the Christmas holiday break came closer, Tibby needed to either find a new home or be put down. The phrase, "to put down" an animal is a more acceptable phrase used by humans to justify the need to end an unwanted pet's life. Tibby was about to be robbed of whatever time she had left. The family had done their best but were unable to welcome Tibby into their home. Tibby was re-homed with me.

Two months later Tibby slid into kidney failure. Though she had had only two months living with me, those months were enjoyed by her. Being such a regal old girl, the younger cats treated her with the greatest respect.

Tibby had selected herself a special sleeping place, underneath the Mandevillia which covered a tin fence. Of course the fence was very warm as the summer sun shone on it and the Mandevillia laid dapple shade onto the ground below. The "bed" was also close to water which Tibby needed to drink often to prevent dehydration as her kidney failure worsened. One of her paws would hang over the edge of the garden. She would slowly stretch and her paws would pad the soil. As the sun moved away, so did Tibby. She had discovered a large, thick foliated yellow daisy growing behind the front fence of my property. As the sun moved away from the Mandevillia, Tibby would stretch and slowly stalk her way down the long, concrete drive towards her daisy. Of course the other cats also liked the warm concrete of the drive to stretch out on. As Tibby made her way down the drive she would encounter other sleepy cats. She would step up to their relaxed bodies, lower her head an inch and stare at the cat she considered should move out of her way. Tibby would neither meow, growl nor move. The offending cat would always struggle to its feet and move just far enough away from Tibby so she didn't have to move a centimeter off her chosen course.

Tibby ate her meals in my spare room along with five, three month old kittens. She treated them the same way she treated the adult cats. Kittens will always rush from one plate of food to another and back again. Tibby merely stood in front of her plate and stared at the kittens. They very quickly got the message, "you eat yours, I will eat mine." She lived her two months in my care with dignity, and when she died she was cremated and buried under the yellow daisy.

Most cats that end up in the care of volunteers are either returned to their owners or re-homed. Scotty, a black and white part oriental boy along with two other cats, both girls, were living in a flat in Worcester Street with their owner. None of the three were de-sexed and all were approximately ten months old.

Their owner was serving a prison sentence. A friend stored her possessions and the CPL was contacted to help with the cats. Two of the cats, Scotty and a ginger and white girl, were taken into the friend's flat, then moved into my care. The third cat was not captured. The two cats were de-sexed, the girl returned to the friend and Scotty stayed in my care. After six months living in my cattery, even though it is large and roomy, Scotty was allowed to run free. After he had eaten his breakfast, the door to the cattery was opened and Scotty bounded outside to climb trees, race around the garden, climb the fences and go visiting the neighbours. He returned to the cattery for his tea and to be secured in the cattery for his safety overnight. Sooner or later he will have to be returned to his owner. The wrench will come whenever he has to be reunited with an owner he won't remember.

There are not many volunteers who have the facilities to board a cat or cats on a long term basis. Occasionally, cat owners who are convicted of a crime and required to spend time in prison, contact the CPL for help. Often the cats are re-homed. One woman had a female cat who had a year old ginger boy from one litter, three teenagers from a second litter and four, four week old kittens from a third. She at least arranged for the CPL to help with her growing family when she was sent to prison. Sadly, when she is released she will probably acquire an un-spayed female and the process will begin all over again.

Every single request for CPL help requires a volunteer's input. Cats and kittens have to be collected which requires a volunteer to drive their car, often miles away from where she or he lives, usually needing the aid of a map for directions. The request is often at the most inconvenient time for the volunteer who puts all aside to rescue cats in need. Though petrol vouchers are irregularly distributed by the CPL, the cost of the rescue trip is mostly funded by dedicated volunteers. The CPL is strictly a voluntary organisation and all donations are extremely welcome.

For the dedicated volunteer, the time, personal effort and even the cost of the rescue, provides more satisfaction than money can offer.

Collecting a mother and her kittens, all terrified, hungry and cold then settling them somewhere warm and safe, seeing them grow and develop into little individuals is a satisfaction unrivalled. Fulfillment for the volunteer comes from seeing the very sick cats and kittens grow into healthy, sociable, homeable adults and teens due entirely to their dedication and effort.

The most difficult decision a volunteer has to make is when to re-home their charges. When a kitten who was nearer death than life when rescued has survived against all odds, because a volunteer would not give up on the tiny furry bundle, slowly develops into a young cat needing to be re-homed, the volunteers heartbreak is intense. Slinky and Patch (Chapter 9), Lucy, Sky and Diamond (Chapter 2), were so small and so sick when rescued. The hours of care they needed was worth it when they grew into mischievous loving pets. When they were fit and old enough, wonderful new homes were

found for them all, leaving the volunteer, myself, with a heavy but happy heart.

Volunteers are called on to fix all manner of cat problems. A perfectly happy cat owned since it was a kitten can at times exhibit unacceptable behaviour. There is usually a trigger. One such incident involved a woman who had a three month old baby. She had owned her five year old cat since it was a kitten. Her cat had started urinating on her bed, her clothes and any possession smelling of her. She was spending all her time with her baby and the cat was very jealous. Urinating on her possessions was the cat's way of expressing its disapproval with the changes in the household. It was suggested to her that if she keep the cat out of the house during the day and shut it in the garage, bathroom or wash house at night, it would adjust to the changes. It would take time and perseverance. The solution was not acceptable to her and she said she would re-home her cat using the Internet. If only all cat problems could be solved online. Until then I take my hat off to the volunteers. The abandoned and stray cats and kittens get a second chance because of volunteers' single minded devotion and effort.

CHAPTER 12

CATS BEHAVIOUR

Chase, Nero, Sally, Monty and those yet to visit my garden

Often, the way cats behave can be quite similar to how a human might act in similar circumstances. In a household with many cats in residence, one cat, usually the oldest, is the undisputed boss. One of the most common threats made to children by their mothers used to be "wait till your father gets home." Father was always the boss. When an altercation erupts in the resident cat population, the boss often only had to appear in the vicinity of the growling participants, stand in their space and dare the fight to continue. It rarely does. The stropky cat, and there is always one, backs away, slowly turns in the opposite direction, and disappears.

Like humans, cats need routine. They prefer their meals at regular times and always in the same place. When the resident cat's meals are being prepared, the cats make their way to the place they expect their meal to appear. Humans eat their meals in the same place, be it at a table or on their lap in front of the television. "Don't sit there" or "you can't eat there," is still heard in many households because that's Mum's place or her chair. Humans wait to be told where to sit when in a new environment so they don't infringe on the unwritten rules of the house.

When a new cat is introduced into a colony of domestic cats it will creep slowly and carefully around the edge of

the assembled cats. It will observe the resident cats who will in turn stare unwaveringly at the interloper. Contact is unlikely at the first meeting. Humans display similar behaviour. When someone walks into a room full of humans who know each other, greetings are exchanged. If he or she knows no one, any contact and interaction is tentative. The human approach just like the cat's, is to assess the situation first.

Behaviour can be learned. A cat can act in a dog like fashion if the only contact it has is with dogs. Not dissimilar to the child raised by wolves. Mimsie (Chapter 5), the tabby and white girl who grew up with two pit-bull terriers is a typical example. Six years after her arrival into my care she still waits at the front gate to escort visitors to the door and when the visit is over escorts them back down the drive to the front gate. She watches the visitors until they have closed the gate behind them then stretches out where she can watch for the next interloper.

Chase, a handsome ginger boy with unusual black whiskers, had lived with an elderly lady for all of his eight years. His owner became ill and was removed into a permanent care facility. A family member, unable to have Chase live with her as she already had five stray cats, took him into a veterinarian to be "put down". Chase had been wonderfully looked after by his one owner, he had been de-sexed and vaccinated and had at least another eight years of healthy life to live. I agreed to take him and find him a new home. Poor Chase! He was settled into my cattery and hated every minute. He paced and cried constantly. After three months I released him. In the time between finishing his breakfast and eating his tea he would roam around my property and investigate the

house. Even though there were another eighteen cats wandering free and interested in who Chase was, he showed no interest and instead made straight for the kitchen. He tracked down the cat biscuit jar and where the food was kept. He pulled the jar from the shelf above the sink down onto the bench. He managed to remove the lid and he tucked in. The jar was quickly removed from his sight and hidden out of his reach, in a cupboard with a cat proof door. Unable to attack the "cookie" jar, Chase hunted down and attacked the tin food. Each day for two weeks, Chase and I had this competition. He wanted the food and I was not going to let him have it. Even though he had been wonderfully cared for he had been given no rules. A bit like a teenager who has never learned that there are consequences for all behavior especially if one does something wrong. Constantly saying "no" and removing what he was not allowed to have finally taught Chase the cat biscuits and the cat food tins were out of bounds. Even cats can learn acceptable behaviour.

Chase now has a great new home. His new owner calls him his "cool dude". He lives with another rescued cat, two are always better than one.

Scotty (Chapter 11), Annie (Chapter 10) and Mitzi (Chapter 5), found that birds regularly nested under the eaves of the neighbours roof, directly opposite my kitchen window. One of the rules of the house is birds are not to be caught. A garden hose is always ready to go. Not long after Scotty was released from the cattery he, as had Annie before him spied the birds flying in and out from under the neighbours roof. His first encounter with the hose chased him off the roof but he was back as soon as I was out of his sight. I was in the kitchen,

attempting to prepare the many resident cats breakfasts, with a full view of the neighbour's roof. Back came Scotty not realising I was watching. He ignored my demands, a bang on the window and a shouted "Scotty get off that roof," so again I grabbed the hose and aimed the spray at him. He raced off the roof and appeared in the kitchen for his breakfast. Next morning Scotty was on the roof again. I yelled at him and he ran off the roof onto the concrete partition between the neighbour's house and garage and stared at me. I pointed the hose at him. As soon as I was out of sight, he slunk back on the roof to the birds nests. Another spray from the hose and again he raced off the roof, across the partition and onto the roof of the garage between our two properties. Again he sat and looked at me. Oh so innocent! He would never do anything wrong. I went inside and again he ran back on the roof. The time to end the game was now. I chased him from the neighbours house roof, over the partition, along the top of the garage roof and down onto the grass in my property, hosing him all the way. He was drenched! He has never been back to the nests. Cats can learn acceptable behavior. Birds are definitely off the menu at my address. Of course the occasional bird does get caught but it is a rare occurrence. Any bird that is caught is immediately taken from the offending cat. The cat is chastised and the bird is buried.

Cats have two main interests in their lives, food and procreation. Abandoned and stray cats live wherever they find a food source, be it a river bank, a park, a factory, a burger bar, public hotel or rubbish bins filled with food scraps such as happens in schools or polytechnics.

After all, if cats or humans don't eat, they will die. Cats

need the food to supply the nourishment needed for the second interest in their lives, to procreate and raise their kittens.

Nero had a three month old kitten when she was trapped by a worker in a lumber yard in Riccarton. Though they were both anti human, neither cat nor kitten attacked. Along with Nero and her kitten Sally, were two other cats, an adult tabby boy and a very young tabby girl. Two more kittens had been seen but were eventually found dead underneath stacks of wood. The very feral tabby boy was de-sexed and returned to the lumber yard with the permission of the owners. Several food shops and workers who threw their leftovers in rubbish bins provided the cats with food. A boiler provided the cats with warmth. Their lives were secure. They would be watched over by the workers from a distance.

Nero and Sally live in my cattery. They have their breakfast then are released for the day returning to the cattery for their tea and overnight. Many of the cats that are trapped can be socialised though may never become cuddly, purr on command pets. The two tabby's still live in the lumber yard. They will protect their food source by chasing away any stray cat who attempts to eat their food. Had they not been returned any un-desexed cat could move into the yard and start another colony of cats and so the process would have begun all over again.

One of the most compassionate, yet ill-advised human actions is the regular feeding of stray cats without attention to their medical needs. When a food source is readily available, several stray cats will gravitate to the same source. Almost without exception, none of the cats

will be de-sexed so procreation is inevitable. Cats have between three kittens, occasionally up to nine, but usually averaging four or five each litter. Female cats have about two to three litters of kittens each yearly season. Half of the kittens born will be female, and the earliest those new kittens can become pregnant is at four months of age. It is easy to understand how quickly a colony grows.

Male cats fight for the females favours. Their claws are long, hard and dangerous. The injuries between the males involved in cat fights are often fatal. Septicemia is quite common. If one of the male cats has FIV AIDS, fighting is likely to spread it. Whether a male cat is someone's un-neutered pet or a cat with no human owner, fighting is the cause of FIV AIDS and it is a fatal disease.

It is concerning that owners still hold to the uninformed and irresponsible beliefs that male cats should not be denied "their fun" and that female cats need to have one litter of kittens to make her a better cat. Better for whom I wonder. Such attitudes lead to the development of unwanted colonies when the un-de-sexed and unwanted animals are deserted.

The common cause of a colony existing in the first place is when a human moves out of premises and leaves their un-de-sexed female behind. So many human owners of male cats do not have their pets neutered and they fight and breed with the abandoned female. Often cats that have formed a colony, underneath a house, in a shed down the end of a property, in a garage on and untenanted property or anywhere else that is quiet and is close to food, can become a nuisance to humans.

Unlike the City Council, Housing New Zealand is one landlord which places some conditions on their tenants if they own a pet. The first is that the tenants need permission from them to own a pet because not all properties will be suitable. If a pet is a persistent nuisance or hazard the rent agreement may be cancelled. In extreme cases, pets can be removed from the tenant's property, at their expense or an end to their tenancy could be sought. It is a start but more control of the rental agreement by the Housing New Zealand property Inspectors is definitely needed. The drains blocked by tiny drowned kitten bodies at a Housing New Zealand property in Opawa (Chapter 7), is a case in point.

A stray cat is a cat that has been owned and for some reason, finds itself without a human owner. A feral cat is an offspring of several generations of a stray cat. It lives its own life without any need for human input. Most stray domestic cats are scared but quickly accept human help. Feral cats neither want nor will accept anything from any human. There is another group that falls between stray and feral. This third group needs humans to provide them with food, but definitely no touching. Jack, Jiminy and Jinx (Chapter 3), fit this category. Jack slowly accepted stroking but neither of the other two needed or wanted it. The three are not feral but they are not domestic stray cats either. They were lucky to have found one of the two cat welfare groups in Christchurch, (CPL and Cat Rescue) who believe cats and kittens deserve a second chance.

A third volunteer group, Cats Unloved, was filmed on TV 3 trapping stray cats from a colony that had been regularly fed by a member of the public. When asked by the reporter "what are you going to do with the cats you have trapped?" the answer was "put them all down. Winter is coming, they will get cold." One wonders how these volunteers could be so ill informed about the ways of the cat. Cats not only grow a heavy winter coat they also share body heat and cuddle up together. Cold weather is absolutely no reason or excuse for trapping and then killing the helpless cats. De-sexing them to prevent the further increase of the colony would make more sense.

Cat Rescue does exactly that. They trap the unsociable strays, de-sex them then return them to where they were trapped. The cats will no longer breed and they will not allow any un-de-sexed cat to infiltrate their colony. The end result is that the colony will eventually cease to exist.

As long as the rights of animals including cats are not enforced, they are free to procreate and owners escape the consequences of abandoning their pets, there will be no end to stray cats in general and in my backyard in particular.

Opposite my back door is a set of three wooden shelves originally used for hardening off seedlings. Monty is a stray who turns up at irregular intervals. He has an unbroken white stripe down the centre of his nose. When he does turn up, he usually keeps appearing nightly for several weeks. Since before Geos (Chapter 3), appeared, I had always fed the hedgehogs that lived in my backyard.

Monty eats on the second shelf, the hedgehogs, sometimes several at a time, eat on the bottom shelf and any other stray cat knows it eats on the third shelf. They devour their food, none of them noticing the other, finish every morsel then disappear into the night. Where food is concerned all animals, even hedgehogs and stray cats, can be trained to come for dinner, and respect each others boundaries. We could all take a lesson from their behavior. Live and let live.

For several years I have had a rubbish drum that is used mainly for garden rubbish and emptied fortnightly. When a new "emptier" arrived to replace the drum he said, "I see you have a lot of cats." Of course I agreed.

He leaned on the drum and replied, "A house is empty if it doesn't have a cat."

Never having considered my many cats in that light I realised he had summed up their presence beautifully. My house, because of the many unwanted, neglected, sick or old cats, will always be full.

PHOTO GALLERY



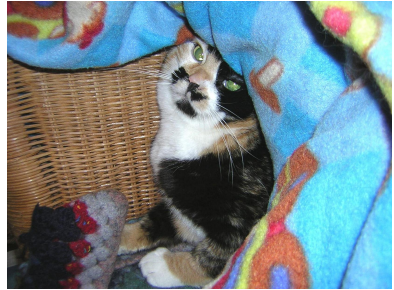
Jack (L) Hugo (R) and Iris
(Middle)



Epson – Healthy and happy



Dave – ooh so happy



Jinks – leave me alone!



Iris standing guard



April loves her comforts



Griffin and kittens find the motherlode!



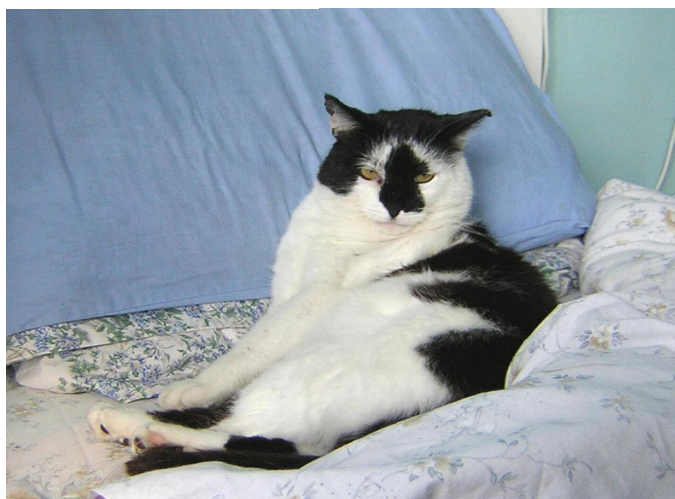
Pixel and her kittens. Pixel still lives with me
188



Nero – Rescued from the
timber yard



Jack and Sally



Rufus loves to sleep on the bed



Nola holding Lucv. Skv and Diamond



Zeppelin on his arrival. He regained his weight and lived several more good years with proper



Every year in new Zealand tens of thousands of cats roam stray. There is nothing difficult about de-sexing cats to prevent them from over breeding yet still their population grows quickly and quietly, causing much displacement and suffering. This book contains the stories of many of those lucky enough to be rescued by the small army of cat lovers and volunteers, including myself, Nola Foote

Copies available at nolaf@clear.net.nz

Digitally Printed

First print March 2009
Copyright © Nola Foote 2009
All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be copied or extracted
without the express written permission of the author,
Nola Foote