



# Catalyst for Cats

A Non-Profit Organization Dedicated to Altering the Future for Ferals

## NEWSLETTER

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### From the Founder

## Times are tough for cats, too, but our work goes on

**D**espite the devastation of COVID-19, the various signs of spring's arrival still amaze me.

Whether or not we ourselves can make use of the longer daylight hours, the displays of nature in renewal return. Trees flower, wild grasses spread, vines creep, birds hatch and, predictably, unaltered animals mate.

I think it safe to say that all of society has been impacted by COVID-19. It seems that life as we knew it and almost all our daily routines have come to a sudden standstill.

I find it hard to fully grasp all the human suffering: the difficulties of the millions living near the edge, the pain of those who are ill and who have lost family and friends.

To all those who help however they can, and to the heroes on the front lines who risk their lives in the course of their duty to care for and protect others, we send our most heartfelt appreciation and gratitude.

Yet as a rescue organization, our mission to alleviate pain and suffering of cats and to feed our established colonies cannot be neglected. Since our North County

allies have been unable to fulfill their plans to do TNR, and because of the public health crisis no organizations there presently are doing spay/neuter surgeries,

we are using our resources as best we can to prevent as many litters as possible from being conceived. We cannot do it all, but we make a difference for those cats we do reach.

Still I shudder to think of the influx of kittens and the suffering of the ferals as nature takes its course this kitten season.

The pause in spay/neuter is a set back to the accomplishments that *Catalyst* and our community has made towards feline welfare over almost three decades.

We are fortunate to be able to continue to feed our colonies and provide medical care. Many of our felines are now seniors and some, amazingly, are over 20 years

of age. We thank our donors for making it possible to give these cats a good life, and we hope for your continued kindness.



*Photo by Colleen Sinclair*

***Where Did All the People Go?*** A feral kitten ten years ago, Scout now checks out his neighborhood from a safe perch indoors in a time of isolation and lockdowns.

*Randi Fairbrother*

# In Appreciation

🐾 **Mellissa Muñoz** – for rescuing and feeding cats since her high school days. She continues to feed and oversee several colonies. Presently she is fostering a scabies cat from one of her feeding sites. Thank you for your kindness to both dogs and cats.

🐾 **Amy Smith** – for her kindness that is never ending. She is in constant motion.

🐾 To **all the feeders**, who care for their colonies daily and then some.

🐾 **Orcutt Veterinary Hospital** – for their many acts of kindness during this difficult time.

🐾 **ASAP** – for all their amazing assistance with finding fosters and securing adoptions.

# Tributes & Memorials

## In Honor of:

**Beloved Charley and Chester** – by Charlene Matzman

**Chloe**, once an outside feral cat, now an inside queen of the realm – by Sharon Tate-Kline

**Chris and Rod Kurtz** – by Lorna White

**Randi Fairbrother** – by Wilma Ann Titus

**Randi**, a wonderful lady – by Irene Kasper

## In Memory of:

**Candy** – by Kay Harrison

**Sammy Homer Dickens** – by Nan Cisney

**Itty** – by Wilma Ann Titus

**Gracie**, loved by John Tapia – by Irene Kasper

**Gracie**, loved by Cindy and John Ross – by Peggy Greer

**Lulu** at Cachuma Lake – by Liz Gaspar

**Momo** – by Naomi Green

**David Morris** and **Jim Reginato**, devoted volunteers – by Nancy Schoenfeld

**Cathrine Overman** – by Nancy Schoenfeld

**Pico**, a feral, rescued from Pico St. in Los Angeles.

Given the best of food and care she lived to be over 24 years old – by Teresa Mitten.

**Lucia Teague** and **Morrie** – by James W. Teague

**Tujungang** and **Cleopatra** – two rescued kittens from L.A. They are forever in my heart and memory – by Allison Coleman

**Tweety**, my loved problem “child” – by Marci Kladnik

**Winn-Dixie** – by Irene Kasper

# Addie has healed nicely, and so has a cat lover’s lonely heart

By Cara Houghton

*Cara Houghton manages volunteers who feed at several North County sites. An update from our last issue:*

Today Addie, that sickly, two-week-old munchkin, barely clinging to life and almost blind, has become a robust, ten and a half pound, fearless, love bug. A year ago, struggling with badly infected eyes, she was taken to Dr. Schmidt, a veterinary ophthalmologist in Arroyo Grande, who ordered multiple eye drops to be given several times a day for weeks. With treatment her eyesight was saved. Today she is incredibly rambunctious.

*Addie about a year ago*

Addie, Rune, and Pumpkin, my feral “fur babies,” have brought immeasurable love and joy into my life. Before becoming a feeder for *Catalyst*, I’d found that joy in Buckles and Bangles, Manx-mix siblings with those cute, stubby little tails adopted from VIVA in



*Photos by Cara Houghton*

*Addie in April, grown and healthy*

renal failure.

When I retired from teaching and was approached by *Catalyst* to feed colonies, I figured I’d get my kitty fix without the emotional commitment. I had no idea I’d become so attached to many of the ferals I fed.

Well, here I am, approximately three years since feeding my first round of sites, and I now have three adoptees who have their forever home. No regrets!

Lompoc. After what seemed like a lifetime of love and joy I had to let them go one by one. Buckles, nearing 16-years-old, with a heart condition, and three years later Bangles because of

# Remembering Tweety: gone and a hard lesson learned

*Ever a handful, her signs of organ failure were tragically mistaken for behavioral issues*

By Marci Kladnik

Last summer one of my former foster failures passed away suddenly from acute liver and renal failure. I had no idea she was ill.

Born under the bathtub in an empty house on the other side of town, two tiny kittens were handed to me in a bucket back in 2008. Two men working on renovations had found them and showed up on my



*Photos by Marci Kladnik*

*Tweety: The gorgeous runt, born on a house renovation site*

doorstep early one morning. The kittens were obviously still very much in need of their momma's milk. Their eyes were barely open so I knew they were only a couple of weeks old.

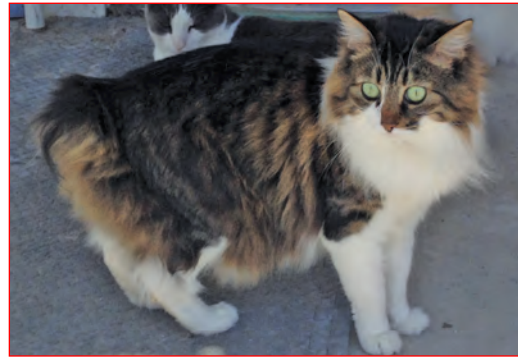
When I questioned the whereabouts of mom, one of the men said it was probably the cat that kept coming into the house while they were there. I agreed and made plans to bring a trap over when they were done for the day. The kittens would survive only a few hours without nursing.

As planned, I took a trap and the two kittens over to the house in late afternoon. When I got there, the men handed me two more kittens that they had found in the woodpile. Momma had obviously been transferring her litter out of the house when the men had disturbed her. Now using the four kittens as bait, I set the trap up in the backyard and hid behind a fence to watch.

It took a couple of hours before mom braved the trap, but now I had the whole family. I took them home to the large cage I had prepared for them in the garage. Mom was feral, and the kittens needed socializing while nursing, so I couldn't bring them inside.

Over the course of a few weeks, I did bring the kittens inside to a smaller cage in my living room for several hours a day for some hands-on work. By the time the kittens were weaned and had reached the weight for spay/neuter, they were very adoptable. All but one kitten weighed in at the required two pounds,

so the "runt" remained behind with me. This was Tweety, the only Manx in the litter, and she was gorgeous.



*The only Manx in the litter, and definitely the alpha member of the pet household.*

For the over 11 years she graced my home, she was both loving and a handful. She was definitely an alpha personality, swatting the boys into place and claiming the litterboxes, cat trees, beds, and me for her own. It was a challenge sometimes, but I placed the litter boxes out in the catio and soon learned to provide two entrances/exits as Tweety wouldn't be able to guard them both.

Tweety tolerated foster kittens upstairs, but she didn't like adult females. She'd show her displeasure by peeing on the dog bed and on my pillow. Another lesson learned, but now she was restricting my foster activities. Still, she was my gorgeous and loving kitty who came to me every morning in bed to suckle on my arm and be petted.

Last spring I had a female cat recuperating in my upstairs bathroom for several weeks. Tweety started peeing in the dog beds again, and also spraying my

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*I hoped that the behavior would stop once the cat upstairs was recovered and adopted out, but sadly the behavior continued. A major clue I misinterpreted.*

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curtains and the couches in the sunroom. I was beside myself, washing and replacing dog beds, covering couches, chairs, and my bed with plastic. I hoped that the behavior would stop once the cat upstairs was recovered and adopted out, but sadly the behavior con-

*Continued on page 4*

# Misreading health issues for long-established behavior patterns

From page 3

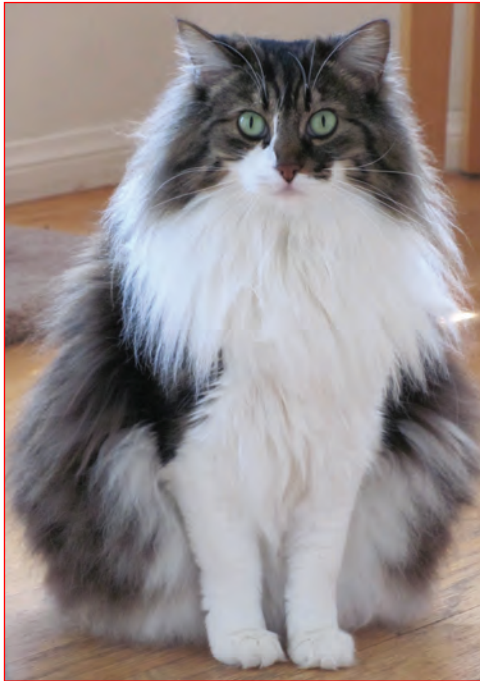
tinued. A major clue I misinterpreted.

I had a road trip scheduled and would be gone for three weeks, hoping to return home to a happier kitty. In August Tweety was taken to the vet for a shave for heavy mats and I mentioned the inappropriate peeing still going on. I asked for a urinalysis, but her bladder was empty so they couldn't do it. Her examination was otherwise normal.

Two weeks later the peeing reached epic proportions and I would get up in the morning to the dog bed literally soaked. Tweety had now begun sleeping upstairs, a place she rarely went. Then she began refusing food. She'd come to the kitchen at mealtimes, but just watch the others eat. She did eat some kibble, so I thought she was just off a bit. One evening she let out an awful cry and started vomiting. She refused all food after that, so I rushed her to the vet.

I still had no idea she was in renal and liver failure.

Sadly it was too late for Tweety. She was now at the stage where tube-feeding and hospitalization would be required and I couldn't put her through that. She was never an easy patient; "fractious" was the term the vet staff used in regards to her as a client, so I could hardly put her or staff into a tube-feeding situation. My only option was to put her down.



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*Tweety tolerated foster kittens upstairs, but she didn't like adult females. She'd show her displeasure by peeing on the dog bed and on my pillow.*

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Here are photos from that day, showing a very alert and seemingly healthy cat at the vet...until you see the state of the tissues in her eyes, ears, and gums. The



Photos by Marci Kladnik

Jaundiced eyes



Jaundiced gums

vet said she'd never seen jaundice that bad before. I walked into the vet joking, "She's baaaaack," referring to their fractious patient, and walking out again a couple of hours later in tears. Not a good day!

In retrospect, now that I know the symptoms of kidney disease, had I just taken her in for a complete checkup including bloodwork and urinalysis when the inappropriate peeing began, Tweety's condition would have been caught in time to do something about it. It was my sad mistake thinking it was behavioral, because she'd peed around before when she was unhappy.

Learn from my hard lesson. If your cat begins peeing inappropriately, take kitty in for a check-up.

If your cat starts sleeping in odd places, take kitty in for a check-up.

If your cat stops eating for two days, take kitty in for a check-up. After three days of not eating, the liver can fail!

Check eyes, gums, and ears for jaundice frequently and take kitty in if yellow is present.

# Harlequin, 'He just showed up one day.'

By Mara T.

**A**s I drive up to the fast food place on the north side of Santa Maria on Christmas day 2019, it is closed and about to rain. I see Harlequin, who I've come to feed, waiting for me. I had been feeding him for a month or two. After eating his dinner he walks off into the bushes as it begins to rain.

I suspect he is the same black and white feline I saw as a kitten in the same area long ago. Later I saw him full-grown, hunting along the busy street corner. I then learned from a friend that he begs for food at the drive-through window, so I spoke briefly with the manager, who said he just showed up one day. I started feeding him in the evening on my way home from work.

After a while I called Randi to find out if Harlequin, who had a tipped ear, had been fixed by *Catalyst*. I told her I wanted to adopt him, and she put me in touch Amy Smith, the nicest local trapper.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Amy asked. "He may break your heart." Yes, I said, I wanted to try.

Within a few days she trapped him and we placed him in a three-tier cat cage at my home.

He has been examined, tested, wormed, vaccinated and flea treated, and he loves his warm, dry, comfortable cage. He's well fed and getting acquainted with my other cats. My cats go in and out as they please during the day. In the evening I roll the cage in when I bring my cats in for the night. He has never bitten me



Photo by Amy Smith

**Fast Food:** Once existing on handouts from a fast food franchise in Santa Maria, Harlequin now shelters in place with his devoted adopter Cara Houghton.

or tried to escape and is getting tamer everyday. He may never be a lap cat, but I've learned patience and kindness can pay off.

Now as I am confined to my own cage due to COVID-19 regulations, I especially enjoy Harlequin's company. I tell myself if I can live in a cage for a month or two, so can he.

Cats benefit from people and people from cats. And thanks to *Catalyst* for their work. If Harlequin had never been neutered, he would no doubt long ago have wandered far away into this city of ninety thousand people. He would never have gotten much of a chance to be or have a friend. Spay and neuter is not just the right thing to do, it is the best thing to do if you care about cats.

## Abandoned and neglected—young mother and six kittens rescued

**S**adly, we often get reports of abandoned and neglected cats. Sometimes a tipped ear can be seen, but more often not. As most of you know, a tipped ear is universal sign that a cat has been fixed.

Recently a tame kitten was given to a family in a Santa Maria apartment complex. They did not allow the kitten into their apartment nor did they feed it regularly. She began to roam throughout the neighborhood, looking for food. One of our volunteers noticed the kitten was hungry and neglected and



One of six from a six-month-old mother

reached out to us. Amy Smith came to the rescue and brought the poor thing to the Orcutt Vet Hospital. Only six months old, she was still a kitten herself and now pregnant.

She delivered six kittens; one did not survive. She is a protective mother and seems to no longer trust people. Amy is fostering her and the kittens. The kittens will be socialized and adopted, and we hope Mom will also be adoptable as a pet, though at this point that is uncertain. She is currently with ASAP in Santa Barbara.

# Updates: Catalyst Action & Related Issues

## FIP no longer an absolute death sentence!

By Marci Kladnik

Late last fall, UC Davis Veterinary School of Medicine held a webinar on the latest breakthroughs in the treatment of Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP). I was fortunate to be invited to attend and am so glad I did! The good news is that FIP is now curable, no longer the death sentence it once was.

The symposium was chaired by Dr. Neils Pedersen at UC Davis, the lead veterinarian for the clinical trials involving a drug known as GC376.

During the first UC Davis clinical trial with 20 cats, only five survived. Dr. Pedersen knew the drug killed FIP, but his team was still fine-tuning dosage and length of treatment. The second trial results were amazing, with 22 of the original 25 cats being cured! The cure, though, comes at a steep price.

FIP is only curable in kittens 12 weeks of age or less, and not every kitten responds the same to the drug. Treatment lasts 12 weeks and consists of about 168 painful injections that can cause deep scarring. And then there is the financial cost. Clinical trials are free for the enrollees, but for those pets in the general population, the cost is high.

The drug is not yet on the mainstream market for treatment of FIP. Even so, the cost of treatments would run \$10,000-\$20,000 for the drug made domestically. (Range in cost is due to weight differences of kittens being treated.)

A Chinese lab also is making a comparable drug that is being tested and used in Europe with fantastic results. This drug can be procured through the underground for the approximate cost of \$2,000-\$5,000, but you need to find a vet who will inject your cat. This issue of finding a veterinarian who will treat your kitten in an off-label manner is a challenge. Their licenses are at stake

The bottom line good news, though, is that a cure has finally been found for FIP. UC Davis, the WINN Foundation, and our own local FIP Warrior, Peter Cohen, are working hard at bringing costs down and raising funds for continuing research. A cure has been found, but the fight is not yet over.

For more information, check out Cohen's website dedicated to FIP. [ZenByCat.org](http://ZenByCat.org)

## Traveling with your cat



Photo by Leah Fairbrother

*Choices: When you're on the road with a cat, it's sometimes nicest for all concerned to let your furry friend spend time out of its carrier. A comfortable cat harness (ruffled skirt optional) is an excellent solution that means windows can come down safely when necessary.*

## Keeping Ants Out of the Food Bowl

As the dry and warm weather approaches we begin to hear complaints of ant invasions. Anti-ant bowls can be purchased over the internet or from pet stores, but they are sometimes difficult to find and usually not suitable for larger colonies.

One suggestion we've found is to cover the base of the food dishes with liberal amounts of Vaseline.

Debby Merry shares her solution here: First pick up all the bowls and sweep the area well, not leaving any morsels of food anywhere. Purchase Bayer brand ant spray in the gallon jug at Home Depot or Walmart. Totally saturate the entire area including fence lines, garage doors, sides of buildings, or whatever surrounds the feeding area over a three to five foot radius. It usually dries within minutes. It's best to do this during the warm part of the day. It usually lasts for several weeks depending on the weather. Repeat after a rain.

# An ancient city understands its community cats

*Travel Notes and Photos By Lin Rolens*

Sicily is a remarkable place, and after the New Year, when most of the tourists have left, it is a great place to visit. I drove around a smoking, snow-covered Mount Etna to Syracuse and its historic center, the island of Ortigia, 300 feet off the coast, surrounded by the Mediterranean.

The Etruscans were here at one time; there are Greek and Roman theaters, the archaeological museum has beautiful 2-foot tall ceramic pots from the 20th Century—that's BCE!

People have lived here for at least 15,000 years.

Ortigia is dense and less than half a square mile in area: tiny alleys with balconied homes shoulder to shoulder pass for streets on this island remarkably



rich in monuments. The cathedral is built with the columns of a temple to Diana. Fish is the primary food here in varieties you've never

heard of, incredibly fresh and prepared with verve and great delicacy. So you wander the antique alleys to the smell of essential Italian cooking, eating a cannoli, filled as you watch with the flavor of your choice as the sea splashes against the rocky shores, and the transport



*Club Med for Cats? Ortigia, the historic heart of the city of Syracuse, lies just off the Mediterranean coast in Sicily. Among its many charms are an abundance of well-cared-for, semi-feral outdoor cats.*

is complete.

**And then there are the cats.** A lot of the cats here are “stray,” but what’s remarkable is that they are generally a plump and happy lot, and the community takes care of these semi-feral families. It was not unusual to see water dishes and plates of dry food and maybe a prime scrap on doorsteps. Many of the Ortigian cats are clearly related, and as I walked down the rocky outcropping that marked the entrance to the small harbor on a very quiet

New Year’s morning, groups of cats peeked out from their hiding places and came out to observe me on the off chance that I might have treats for them.

There were two related groups, some clearly mature and others just leaving kittenhood, and they were interested in me and in the winter sun that was beginning to



warm the rocks. The remarkable part of this encounter was that all but the youngest of them had tipped ears; this community valued their cats and were working to stabilize their populations so that all of these “strays” could live long and happy lives.

From many dozens of decades of maintaining balance and of valuing the interconnectedness of all the lives in that limited space, the Ortigians had learned the importance of caring for their feline comrades.



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**Every litter adds to the problem**  
**Every spay/neuter adds to the solution!**