

Second-Chance CATS

True Stories *of the* Cats We Rescue
and the Cats Who Rescue Us

Callie Smith Grant, ed.



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To the rescuers and the rescued
and to cat lovers all over the world

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Introduction

Callie Smith Grant

I have had many cats in my lifetime, and they were seldom chosen. Many showed up at my door somehow, or an unfortunate situation presented itself, and a strange cat became my cat. They got a second chance at life, and I got a new friend.

The first cat I remember was a feral black tom, though my grandmother called him wild. He would sit outside the kitchen window, leaning against the glass for warmth, and that wild boy would watch me, the small child, eye to eye. I could never pet him, but even through the window, I felt he was my friend. Over the years, various stray cats showed up at my family's country home—silvery grays, tabbies, and gingers. They moved in and became my buddies. My mother rescued a pretty tuxedo girl from a situation we would call animal hoarding today, and that cat slept on my bed every night during my teenage years. When I was in college, my roommate saw someone throw a pillowcase from a moving car—a pillowcase full of three terrified kittens, all of whom we kept and loved. And there were many more.

For twenty years, I have been writing about these animals, and for much of that time I have also collected other writers' true stories for book compilations about cats, dogs, or horses. A few years ago, I approached my publisher with an idea of compiling true stories about animals of many species who rescue humans in some way. Was the publisher interested?

Kind of.

The publishing committee liked the rescue theme, but they preferred the book be only about dogs. I considered that, then suggested two compilations instead—one about rescue dogs and one about rescue cats. The committee responded that they still wanted only the dog book because “people don't think of cats as rescuers.”

Hmmm. I understood why they said that, and I realized I had work to do. The second part of being a rescue cat is getting the chance to pay good things forward to their humans and even rescue them in various ways. I'd seen that happen.

We went ahead with the dog book, which became *Second-Chance Dogs*. Later I brought up the cat idea again, this time with a broader meaning of the word *rescue*. I included a couple of true narratives that showed how some humans rescue cats and how these cats rescued them back in their unique feline ways. The committee saw this as something exciting to sell, and that book became *Second-Chance Cats*. Simply defined, these are the cats who show up—for a new home or a new relationship. Then they show up again—to provide companionship, respite, stability, and more.

In this collection of true stories, some cats are rescued from shelters. Some are plucked from homeless litters. Cats are rescued from parking lots and even from a big box store. One little guy is literally snatched up from the middle of a road. Sometimes a child brings home a cat, sometimes a spouse brings one home,

sometimes another animal brings home the cat. Or sometimes the cats, being proactive kinds of beasts, decide for themselves who's going to "rescue" them by arriving at the right place, right time. Or the right place, wrong time, and that's another story . . .

We meet cats from humane societies and shelters, kittens being sold out of a box, cats presenting themselves at the worst time or at the best time. Sometimes they travel long distances to arrive at a doorstep by mysterious, sometimes jaw-dropping, means. They help with the care of humans and sometimes other animals.

We also meet cats with physical disabilities who make wonderful pets. Cats with blindness, deafness. Cats with diseases kept at bay who live full and happy lives. Amazing feral cats who develop community relationships with each other. Cats who turn people from cat-neutral to cat-positive. Cats who clearly improve the daily lives of those who know them.

So do cats rescue? You bet they do, and you'll read about them here. It can be subtle when they let humans know something is amiss and needs tending. They pay forward the consideration given them by rescuing children and adults from loneliness. They help the young, the aged, the physically impaired, the mentally ill. A few times, in this book, the rescue is more direct. A cat finds an abandoned litter of kittens that humans are searching for. A cat helps a couple of humans stay alive. Literally. And some of these cats help each other too.

So the committee got the book they believed they could sell. Storytellers got to honor their cats by telling their stories. And I had the privilege of pulling together a heartwarming collection. If you know and love cats, I am happy to report that you are about to meet some very cool cats—some who may seem familiar to you and some so amazing you couldn't imagine them existing. That happened to me, and I've been a cat lover since I was a toddler.

I know these are stories you'll love to read and pass along. Enjoy!

1

Lady Finds a Lap

Lonnie Hull DuPont

When I was in high school, a friendly, long-legged ginger tomcat appeared at the back door and decided to stay. He had some scars and was not young. But what a nice guy he was. When it was clear he was moving in, we got him neutered and vaccinated. He became an indoor/outdoor cat at our house and lived a happy rest-of-his-life with us.

He won Dad over right away. I'm convinced cats zero in on who needs to like them. Fortunately, Dad was hooked. He named the cat Tom and turned him into sort of a dog-cat who followed him all around our property. Tom would leave his window naps anytime he heard Dad pull a coat from the back door closet and run to join him. He hung out in the garage while Dad tinkered on cars. He slept on Dad's lap during TV time.

Tom came to Dad immediately when called by name, the first cat I knew to do that. At night, I would stand at the back door

and call Tom home the way my grandmother taught me—“Here kitty-kitty-kitty-kitty-kitty . . .”—fast like an auctioneer until I was out of breath. Then I’d suck in more air and start over. At which time, Dad would have me step aside, and he’d call, “Tom.” If necessary, he’d add, “Tom Cat.” That’s all it took, and here came that leggy boy, loping in from the back fields, chatting at Dad the whole way.

I would stay at the back door and keep calling for our other cat, Boots, who would show up in her own good time. She was that kind of cat, a strong-willed, serious hunter turned living room diva. She had not been thrilled about Tom moving in, but she adjusted. They were not great buddies, but they got along well enough, as a neutered male and a spayed queen often do.

If our cats didn’t appear when called at night, there was a way for them to get into the house without all the in-and-out drama. Dad left a broken basement window covered in vines unfixed, making an unusual but effective pet entrance. Since our farmhouse was well over a hundred years old and few inside doors would close all the way anymore, our cats could paw open doors to get to and from the basement.

Eventually Boots passed away, and then we had only Tom and my parents’ small dog. I never knew Tom to pay much attention to Boots while she was alive, but it appeared he was feeling a loss of some kind for his own species. I say that because, within days, he literally brought home another cat.

On that day, Tom appeared from the basement via the laundry room and wound up in the kitchen, where he loudly meowed. We discovered he’d brought a friend with him—a black-and-white short-haired female I’d never seen before. She bore a cut on her face, a weepy eye, and a messed-up ear. She right away urinated on the rug, and Tom yowled at her until she seemed sufficiently shamed. Dad approved of her, so we whisked her off to the vet to

get her injuries treated. She came home to be christened with the name Lady by Dad. And a lady she was indeed. She turned into a big, beautiful tuxedo cat with round topaz eyes rimmed in her natural black eyeliner.

Now that Tom had replaced Boots and rescued his new injured friend, he apparently considered his work done. He ignored Lady from then on.

Dad and I were fond of Lady and both talked to her. She was very warm toward us, purring and looking into our eyes. But Mom never took to her. All but one of our pets over the years were strays. Mom only had one pet she chose herself, and that often annoyed her. She was good to our pets, and she had always liked Tom. But for some reason, not Lady. Mom claimed that she was tired of cleaning up after shedding cats, so she made a new rule that Lady was never to leave the kitchen, except to go through the basement to the outdoors.

Lady was given a chair of her own in the kitchen. Since this room was an active hub, at least she was around people. But she sometimes seemed more of a fixture than a pet. She dealt with it graciously, though every now and then she ventured forth into the living room, only to have my mother say, “Oh no you don’t.” Then Lady would twirl around and head back to her kitchen chair as if she had intended to do that all along.

After college, I moved back home for a couple of years. During my first winter back home, we lost Tom to old age. A few months later, my folks took their dog and headed south for a winter of warmer weather. Now it was only Lady and me, holding down the fort together in the old house.

During our winter together, I had no desire to confine Lady to the kitchen, so I let her explore and tiptoe about. She seemed only interested in the dining and living rooms. She curled up on the couch with me while I read, and she was a big love with a

deep purr. I had two wisdom teeth pulled that winter, and that turned into an unexpectedly painful situation for a weekend. I probably should not have been alone for that, especially with the negative way I reacted to codeine. But Lady was with me—attentive, purring, and curling up on my lap or sleeping with me on the couch. She was a wonderful distraction and truly a caring presence.

After spending the winter with Lady, I decided that this sweet tuxie girl needed a home where she could be what she truly was—a sociable lap cat who wanted to get off that kitchen chair and be someone’s beloved companion. While I never understood my Mom’s behavior toward this nice cat, I did know it wasn’t going to change. So I took it upon myself to look for a new home for Lady.

The first re-homing didn’t work out, and to this day I feel awful about it. I didn’t know the people that well—friends of friends—which was my mistake. Lady would not venture forth in her new home, which is fairly normal behavior for a cat in a new place. She immediately hid, and that particular household had no patience for it. They called me the next day to take her back. I had chosen the wrong home for this lovely girl.

So I picked Lady up, and I’ll never forget how subdued she was on the drive back home. I could feel her uncertainty. I apologized to her and said I’d do better next time.

Next time was the right time. I mentioned wanting to find Lady a home to an old high school friend, and he said his elderly grandmother lived alone and might be interested. She was indeed. We took Lady to her new home several miles away from my folks’ house, and although I hated to say good-bye, I knew this was going to be the home where Lady could shine. She knew it too; this time she didn’t hide.

So Lady landed on her pretty feet once again, as some cats manage to do. When after a few months I asked about her, my friend said his grandmother had just bought Lady a new rhinestone collar.

We were all happy for her. Even Mom.