

# The Cat on My Lap

Stories of the Cats We Love

Edited by  
Callie Smith Grant



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To the memory of my mother  
who loved kittens and cats  
and was known in my home  
as Cat-Grandma





# Contents

- Foreword 9  
*H. Norman Wright*
- Introduction 11  
*Callie Smith Grant*
- A Dickens of a Cat 13  
*Gwen Ellis*
- Clover 20  
*Twila Bennett*
- The Way Back Home 25  
*Gregory L. Jantz, PhD*
- Small Miracles 30  
*Lonnie Hull DuPont*
- A Mocha's Just What I Needed 39  
*Amy J. Tol*
- Mittens 47  
*Marci Alborghetti*
- The Cat Who Rescued the Boy 53  
*Linda S. Clare*
- Angel 58  
*Lisa-Anne Wooldridge*
- The Peacemaker 61  
*Callie Smith Grant*
- My Mother's Cat 75  
*Renie Burghardt*



The Writer and the Monk	79
<i>Robert Benson</i>	
The Cat Who Would Eat Anything	87
<i>Tracie Peterson</i>	
The Manger Cat and His Mama	93
<i>Paul Ingram</i>	
Frankie, the Guardian Cat	101
<i>Alyce McSwain</i>	
The Cat Who Loved Chemo	105
<i>Sue Buchanan</i>	
Cat Lady	114
<i>Thora Wease</i>	
Iffy	120
<i>Linda Shands</i>	
One More Time	124
<i>Terri Castillo-Chapin</i>	
Peace for Pickles	135
<i>B. J. Taylor</i>	
Empty Arms	143
<i>Linda Shands</i>	
Out of the Woods	149
<i>Jeanette Thomason</i>	
An April Fool's Prayer	164
<i>Bonnie Compton Hanson</i>	
A Gift from God	172
<i>Mary Ann Cook</i>	
Three Cats and a Stepdad	175
<i>Julianne Dwelle</i>	
Acknowledgments	186
Notes	187
Contributors	188

# Foreword

H. Norman Wright



**C**an you imagine your life without a cat? Not if you're reading this book. Now and then you will find a book that's difficult to put down. And this is one of them. The stories cover a wide spectrum. Memories of your own cat history will surely be activated. At times you will find yourself smiling or even laughing as you connect with a story. You'll remember the sounds of a purr or a hiss or a quiet meow. You'll remember long-lost images of your cat climbing up the drapes or hiding in the shower or stealing that piece of fish from the counter. You might even remember the panic you felt when you couldn't find your cat for a few hours, or even several days. And you might remember the feel of that dead mouse under your foot, which was really a gift from your proud hunter.

This book is both inspirational as well as informative. The various contributors create pictures in your mind so you feel as though you are right there. You

might plan to read “just one story,” but you’ll have difficulty stopping.

This is the kind of book that won’t stay on your shelf, but you’ll want to say to other cat lovers, “Here—you will really enjoy these stories . . . but I want my book back when you’re through.”

# Introduction

Callie Smith Grant



**I** was on a mission.

I love cats, always have. I consider them some of God's best engineering. So compiling a book of cat stories sounded like a delightful task for me, and I put out the call for stories.

Anyone who has a cat certainly has a story, and those stories are as varied as the coats on cats. I wanted not only a variety of stories but specifically stories that showed the importance of cats in the grand scheme of one's life. Stories that showed cats being and doing what they were put on earth to be and do. Stories that showed cats showing up when needed. Stories that showed that perhaps the Creator sent just the right beast for the right situation at the right time. I received scores of stories that were testament to these very things.

Then I got on a more difficult mission. What if I could find stories that showed cats actually saving lives? I've heard of them waking up people when there's a fire or

a gas leak. Those stories must be out there. Certainly dogs save lives. We've all seen footage of dogs pulling people out of fires, swimming them out of floodwaters, or fiercely guarding their beloved humans from harm. Surely there must be a cat out there that saved a life.

There is indeed. There are many, and some of them are in this book. But they didn't haul anyone from a burning building—nothing so overt as that. These lifesaving cats were much more . . . let's say . . . *catlike* about saving lives of humans.

In these pages, you'll meet cats that soothed childhood hurts, promoted peace in the household, protected children, assured troubled humans, and even, in their own ways, impacted journeys of faith. A God-sent cat did "save" humans in the ways cats operate—quietly, low to the ground, on tiptoe, purring all the way.

Joy Davidman, the wife of C. S. Lewis, found great solace in cats. In her writing, she alludes to poet Francis Thompson who suggests in "The Hound of Heaven" that God pursues us like a great hound. Joy Davidman wrote that with her, "God was more like a cat. He had been stalking me for a very long time, waiting for his moment, he crept nearer so silently that I never knew he was there. Then, all at once, he sprang."<sup>1</sup>

Cats have their ways. Felines are on this earth to be what they are. Sometimes those unique ways of the cat come into our lives and help us. In these pages, you'll meet such marvelous cats and their humans, read their stories, and ponder this amazing beast created on the fifth day.

# A Dickens of a Cat

Gwen Ellis 

**G**wen, I think it's ovarian cancer, and I think it's spread everywhere. I'm so sorry." These were the grim words of my surgeon in late October. "Go home, get your affairs in order, and we'll operate as soon as we can."

I had surgery in mid-November and learned that I, indeed, had an aggressive form of ovarian cancer. Then there were complications—intestinal blockage—and ten days in the hospital.

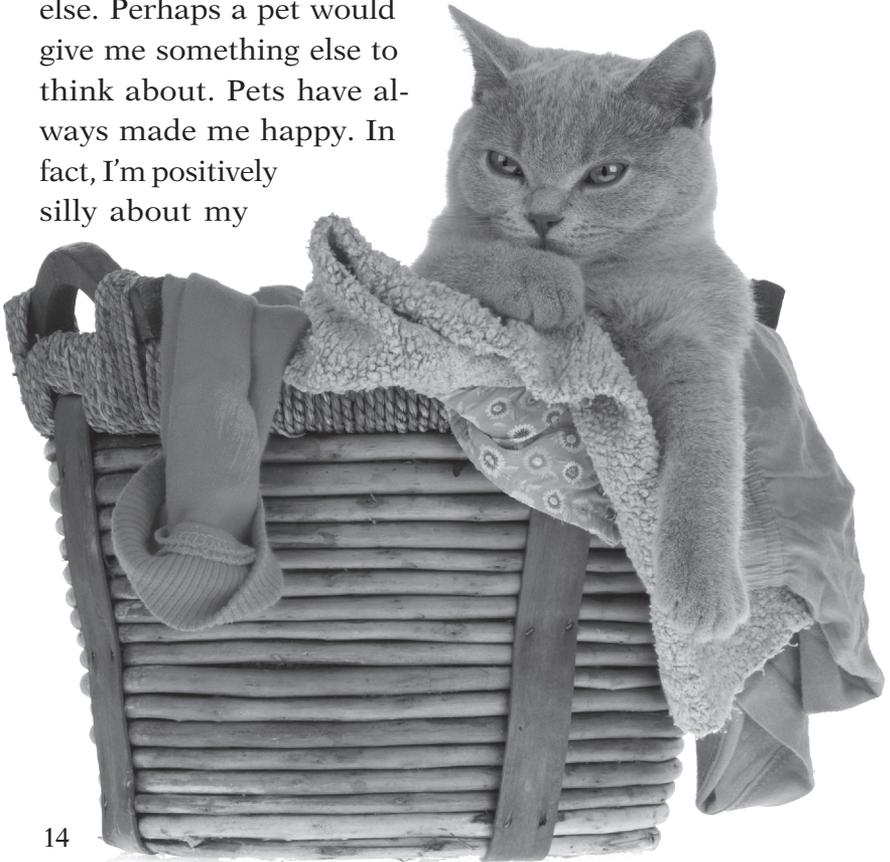
I was weary of being in the hospital. I was frightened about my future. I worried if I was even going to have a future. I had been divorced a year earlier and I wondered how I was going to cope with chemotherapy, my job as an editor, and taking care of my house in the country all by myself.

Sometime during those ten days, my daughter began to say, “Mom, I don’t want you to be alone. I think you need a pet.”

“Oh, Wendy, how could I take care of a pet? I’m so weak I can hardly take care of me.”

“What about a cat? Cats don’t require much care.”

“I’m a dog person,” I answered with my “and that’s final” tone. But one night after my concerned daughter had gone for the evening, I began to think about what she’d said. We were so focused on my cancer and whether I’d live or die that we thought of little else. Perhaps a pet would give me something else to think about. Pets have always made me happy. In fact, I’m positively silly about my



pets. The doctor had already told me that the very best therapy was going to be a positive attitude.

I went to sleep that night thinking about the kind of pet I might want. In the morning when Wendy came I shocked her by saying, “All right, I’ve decided I want a cat. I want you to go to the animal shelter and get me a black-and-white tuxedo cat. Since I’m a book editor, I think I should have a very literary-looking cat, don’t you? His name will be Charles Dickens. Make sure he looks the part. He should have a bib and white mittens and socks, and a mustache would be good.”

She didn’t make it to the shelter that day because after all those long tiresome days, I was suddenly dismissed from the hospital. But the next afternoon, Wendy got a “mommy sitter” and then went to get my cat. I could hardly wait for her to get home. When the garage door opened, Judy, my “sitter,” jumped up to see what Wendy had brought.

It was a young, bright-eyed black cat with a white bib, the compulsory white mittens and socks, and a one-sided mustache. I couldn’t believe it. I had told Wendy what I wanted, but I never dreamed she would find the exact cat I’d described. “Hello, Charles Dickens,” I said. He said, “Meow.”

Dickens had a history. He had been a very frightened stray who went in a rainstorm to a house where he couldn’t stay because there were already three cats living there. The lady of the house wept as she took

### *I'll Take the House Salad, Please*

Here's a treat for indoor cats. Buy a bag of oat seeds from a feed store or a nursery—oats are very cheap. Plant a handful of seeds in a pot with moist soil and keep covered until sprouting occurs. Water occasionally—out of cat's reach for the surprise factor—until the grass is nice and tall. Then spritz with water, serve up to a happy cat, and let the noshing begin. Water when needed. Grass will wither after a few days. Then dump it and start the process again.

Or, as long as you have a lawn that is not chemically treated, you can pull grass for your cat's greens. Look for the greenest and thickest patch. Serve it up fresh on a plate and watch kitty chow down. Toss out whatever your beast doesn't eat right away. One cat lover reports on the first time she offered this green salad to her excited house cats: "It was like serving chocolate at a PMS convention."



him to the pound and told the attendants, "Make sure whoever gets him calls me."

That evening I called her, and she told me, "I'm about to have a baby, and I already have three cats. I couldn't keep him, but I just loved him. I prayed God would send him to someone who needed him and would really love him."

I realized in that moment that Dickens had not come to me by chance. "Your prayers have been an-

swered,” I said. I told her my story and ended with, “I need him.”

All that first day and the next, Dickens went over my house with a “fine-toothed nose.” He poked into every crevice and cranny. Then he began to sneeze. He sneezed and sneezed and sneezed. His nose was running and his eyes were dull. Dickens was sick. Wendy took him to the vet.

“Is he going to die?” I asked when she brought him home.

“The vet doesn’t think so. He thinks Dickens is old enough and strong enough to survive. He gave me some antibiotics that we’ll start him on right now.”

Poor Dickens. He was very sick. He lay on the foot of my bed on a hot water bottle for days. It had been my intention to refocus our attention on something besides my illness and upcoming chemotherapy, and I surely did it. All we could think about was whether Dickens would live or die.

One day, after about eight days, there was a turning point. Dickens sprang up from the hot water bottle with a gleam in his eye. “Well, hello, cat,” I said. And I could see in an instant that I had correctly named him. He was going to be a rascally dickens all right. He crouched around corners waiting to spring at me as I passed by. He attacked my feet under the covers. He played until he dropped exhausted at my side.

Then it was time for my chemotherapy. Wendy went with me for the first round of treatment. I didn’t learn until later how frightened she, too, had been.

I didn't realize what it was costing her emotionally to see her mother in this dire situation. Neither of us knew when (or if) I, like Dickens, might have *my* turning point.

I tolerated the first round of chemotherapy fairly well, and I thought I could make it through the remainder of the twenty-four treatments on my own. So I sent Wendy home to Seattle to take up her life with the understanding that if I couldn't get along without help, she would come back.

Twenty-one days after I began chemotherapy, my hair started coming out—great handfuls of it. I was ready with my wig and scarves. Just then Dickens decided my pillow was a good place to sleep. I don't know, perhaps he thought my balding head needed to be kept warm. I do know that in the mornings my pillow was a mess. It was covered with his fur and my hair, making it hard to tell who was shedding the most.

There were lots of nights during the next six months when I would wake from a deep sleep and be nauseated beyond belief. Dickens by now was sleeping in the crook of my arm. When I was sick, he'd jump to the end of the bed and wait. When I would lie down exhausted from vomiting, he would instantly jump back to my side and snuggle down. This little creature God had sent my way blessed my long, lonely nights.

Then there were the days Dickens raced me up the stairs. At my pace it wasn't much of a race, really. He

romped and played and made me laugh and laugh and laugh. I tolerated the chemotherapy pretty well, and I am sure one reason was because Dickens gave me a merry heart that “did good, like medicine.”

Then, at last I was through with chemo. All I had to do was wait. In October my surgeon said, “We’d like to do a second-look surgery. We can’t find any cancer from the outside and we’d like to take a look inside.”

This time my son, Mark, came to stay with me during surgery and to take care of Dickens. After only an hour in surgery, through my anesthesia-induced fog, I heard my very delighted surgeon say, “It’s gone. There’s no cancer anyplace.”

I had my turning point! I was going to live. Five days later I went home, and while I couldn’t scoop Dickens up (he now weighed fourteen pounds and I was not supposed to lift anything over ten), I sat down and he crawled into my lap. “Well, cat,” I said, “it looks like I’m going to stick around for a while. We both made it. We’re survivors.” Dickens didn’t say much. He just stretched a little and purred and purred.