

Happy Tabby

*Develop a Great Relationship
with Your Adopted Cat or Kitten*

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Logical Expressions, Inc.

Happy Tabby

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Adopting a Cat

Cats are the most popular pet in the United States, yet many people seem mystified by the feline creatures with whom they share living space. This book helps prepare you for adopting a cat, explains your choices, so you can select the right cat for your family, and gives you advice on how to deal with challenges you may face when you share your life with an adopted cat.

This book is also based on reality. My cat, your cat, and pretty much everyone's cat is not going to be the perfect model citizen all the time. Like people, no cat is perfect. Most people adopt cats because they are hoping to enjoy companionship and years of cuddly moments with their new feline friend. And for me, sharing my life with my furry critters is extremely satisfying. However, cats are cats; they are not tiny people in furry suits. Expecting them to act in any "human way" is unfair and a primary reason so many cats end up in animal shelters.

For example, your cat does not run away or scratch the furniture out of spite or to be "mean." A cat will do many things because of instinct and nature. My goal with this book is to help explain some of these behaviors and what you can do to avoid or solve problems when they come up.

A recent survey from the American Pet Products Manufacturer's Association says that 90 million people own cats, yet the Humane Society of the United States estimates that only 2%–5% of cats that enter shelters are reclaimed by their owners. In fact, of the estimated 6–8 million dogs and cats that enter U.S. shelters, 3–4 million are euthanized because there are not enough homes for them.

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When I was volunteering at an animal shelter and started writing pet columns in our local newspaper, the shelter manager I worked with always said, “don’t forget about the cats!” Although cats are generally easier to care for than dogs, they do have a number of basic needs. Like the old joke says, dogs have owners and cats have “staff.” Yet people aren’t born knowing everything about how to care for cats, so I cover what you need to know in the pages of this book.

Mostly, this book is about understanding and compassion. When you adopt a cat, you make a commitment to caring for her. Your cat may not be perfect, but she is your cat. And I feel sure, you aren’t perfect either. You have human foibles, stresses and issues going on in your life. But your cat is depending on you for her day-to-day existence.

If you treat your cat well, you will be rewarded with happy purring, countless cuddly moments, and endless feline entertainment for years to come.

About Me

This book is designed especially for owners of cats that have been adopted from humane societies, animal shelters, or breed rescues. It’s about cats that have been given a second chance at a new home, so I don’t talk about the latest in “cat fancy” or very much about the various breeds of cats. Realistically, most cats at shelters are “mutts” for lack of a better term.

This book is for people who want to develop a good relationship with their family cat. As a former animal shelter volunteer, veterinary technician, and owner of six shelter critters, I’ve seen a lot. This book contains my best advice for people like you, who have chosen to adopt, but need specialized guidance on dealing with “previously owned” cats.

This book also includes my personal experiences in solving the problems of my own adopted cats. Like any pet owner, my life with cats has not been completely without incident. I talk about these issues in sidebars that appear throughout the book. The sidebars also contain a few personal reflections on life with my two slightly offbeat tabby companions, Alia and Troi.

With my cats, I have lived through and found solutions for many common kitty problems: such as clawing, yowling, eating bad things, illness, breaking glass, and innumerable other incidents that I've undoubtedly blocked from my memory.

My cats are hardly perfect and I'm not an extraordinary pet owner. In fact, I'm just like you. I like cats and I want to have them in my life. One thing I do realize, however, is that every pet is an individual and you have to work within the limitations of the animal's personality.

For example, years ago, I had a cat named Chani. She was not exactly the sharpest knife in the drawer and she was extremely shy. I didn't expect her to suddenly become a rocket scientist or come out and be gregarious with strangers. It just wasn't in her nature. During her life, she did, however, spend many, many happy hours curled up in my lap. Basically, she was *my* cat and she liked it that way.

If you've ever read a cat book that sounded like it was written by a veterinary committee, you can be sure this one is different. I've lived with and experienced myriad problems with my cats. But now we peacefully cohabit and life is good. If I can do it, so can you!

Every Rescue Has a Story

As I mentioned, this book is about reality and I refer to my (very real) cats throughout the book. When I worked at an animal shelter, I learned that every rescue has a story. Here is your introduction to the all-feline team:



Alia (gray and white tabby): We adopted Alia and her sister Chani from a group in San Diego called Friends of the County Animal Shelters (FOCAS). This group pulled cats that were on “death row” from the shelters and put them into foster care, so they’d have a

better chance at adoption. However, Alia and Chani never spent any time in a shelter because they were fortunate enough to have a mother cat who was found by a FOCAS volunteer in the dumpster in her condo parking lot.



The volunteer took in the momma cat and let her have kittens in a spare bedroom. Then she adopted out two of the kittens to us. We signed all the contracts as if we were adopting the cats from a shelter. Although they didn’t enjoy it,

the feline team left the sun of Southern California and survived the move to Idaho. Alia is still going strong, but Chani, who was the runt of the litter, died in 2000 from kidney failure.



Troi (brown tabby): We adopted Troi from a humane society south of here because Alia was incredibly depressed after the death of her sister tabby Chani. I never would have believed it if I hadn't seen it, but it seems that cats do grieve. Alia would no longer get up and wander around. All she did was eat, sleep, and cry

mournfully. She got hugely fat and we were afraid Alia would just sort of curl up and die. I consulted a behaviorist who suggested getting a kitten who looked as much like Chani as possible. Oddly enough, the shelter only had one tabby in residence at the time: Troi. We took her out of the kennel and played with her for a while. She seemed nice enough, but we decided against adopting her, mostly because we were still so upset about Chani's death.



I put Troi back in the kennel and said goodbye. As I was walking out of the room, I looked back at her. She gave me a look of such disappointment that I turned around. I knew then I had to take her. So we adopted her after

all. Named after Counselor Troi in Star Trek, she has done a tremendous job of counseling Alia. And the ironic thing is, even though she was lanky and leggy at 5 months when we got her, she grew up to look almost exactly like Chani, who was a small, rotund cat. It's weird. Even though Troi has a completely different personality, sometimes I think Chani's spirit is in there somewhere. Plus, just like Chani, Troi has discovered that my lap is a fine place to be.

Why Adopt a Cat

As I mentioned earlier, cats are popular. Yet even though so many homes have one or more cats, there still are many more cats than there are permanent, loving homes for them. Because of cats' impressive reproductive capabilities, every year shelters are inundated with homeless cats during "kitten season." Unfortunately, every community has stray and feral cats that aren't spayed and neutered. Cats do what cats do and the result is the yearly onslaught of kittens.

The bottom line is that the best reason to adopt a cat or kitten is to save a life. Staggering numbers of cats are euthanized every year. Most of them are not "bad" in any way. They aren't mean, dangerous, crippled, or sick. In fact, they are probably kittens whose only crime is that they are unwanted and unlucky. If you've decided to make a cat a part of your life, choosing to adopt means you're going to give a cat another chance at a good life.

If you need another excellent reason to adopt, consider this: you'll be lessening the amount of animal suffering in the world. People who give up their cats for adoption often say they "don't have time," the kids "don't help," or they suddenly developed "allergies." What all these excuses really mean is they never anticipated the responsibility of pet ownership. Because of their lack of foresight, the cat is taken to a shelter and his whole world is turned upside-down. When you adopt, you restore happiness and love to that critter's life, which is definitely something to feel good about!

When you adopt a cat, you also do a good deed for your community. There are financial as well as emotional costs associated with tracking down cases of animal cruelty, impounding unwanted or abused animals, and maintaining an

animal shelter. When you adopt a shelter cat, you help to ease these community financial and emotional burdens.

The biggest challenge facing animal shelters is pet overpopulation. It's not just during "kitten season" either. Shelter employees hear just about every excuse in the book for people dropping off their pet's "accidental" litters at the back door. The reason this problem continues is obvious: unlike people, cats and dogs don't have just one offspring at a time. One cat or dog that has babies and whose babies have babies can be responsible for the birth of 50 to 200 kittens or puppies in just one year. The reproductive rate of dogs is 15 times that of humans, and the reproductive rate of cats is 30 times that of humans.

Spaying or neutering is the solution to this pet overpopulation problem. It's better for you, better for the community, and (contrary to the endless old wives' tales) much better for the animal as well. It's simple: spayed or neutered animals are better behaved and healthier. Females spayed before their first heat cycle are healthier than those that aren't. (Ask your vet, it's true!)

Neutered male animals are better behaved and have fewer problems with aggression. Neutering reduces roaming and fighting and most animals lose the desire to constantly mark their territory. Animals that have been spayed or neutered also tend to live an average of two to three years longer than unsterilized pets.

Your Cat and You

Many of us live a stressful existence. As you run from place to place with a cell phone glued to your ear, it can be a challenge to just stop for a minute and look at the world around you.

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Fortunately, those of us with pets have a live-in example of how to be “in the moment.”

Cats don't worry about deadlines and they don't nag you (except maybe for dinner). You may have noticed that a feline sleeping in the sunlight is rarely stressed out. Your cat can be endlessly amused simply by watching an errant insect crawl across the floor or by jumping on a paper bag.

Many studies have shown that owning a pet is good for you. Although a pet isn't a substitute for human companionship, people who have pets are less likely to become depressed. Having a pet forces you to think about something outside of yourself and your own little thoughts. Coming home to feed or play with the cat gives you a sense of purpose and responsibility. Someone is depending on you.

Studies have shown that owning a pet can actually have a beneficial effect on your blood pressure. Apparently those who had adopted a cat or dog had lower blood pressure readings in stressful situations than their pet-free counterparts. Many studies indicate that owning a pet can keep us healthier and happier for longer.

When you have pets, you are never alone. Probably the loneliest time of my life was when I was first married before we got our kitties. When my husband traveled, the house was completely silent. It was the first time in my life I'd ever not had some type of animal in the house, and it was just plain strange. Although cats are often very quiet, it's comforting just to know they are there. And if laughter is the best medicine, pets can be a great prescription for the blues. It's hard to maintain a straight face when you watch a cat do something really dopey like “miss” while jumping up onto the sofa. (It's even funnier to witness the cat indignantly stalk off and pretend she did it on purpose.)

Unfortunately, when this human–animal bond is broken, the results often affect far more than the pets in the family. In homes where spousal or child abuse exists, animal abuse often happens first. In fact, many women who would otherwise seek shelter end up staying with an abuser because of threats to kill the family pet.

Fortunately, the link between animal abuse and family violence is becoming more well known and publicized, so that in some communities law enforcement and animal services are working more closely. Most humans struggle and stress over problems of their own creation. Pets can be a valuable window into a simpler, more peaceful existence. Adopting a pet is a way to add more love into your life and that’s certainly a good thing.

Is Adoption Right for You?

The purpose of this section is simple: to make sure you’re really ready to take on that shelter cat or kitten.

Acquiring a pet has a big impact on your daily life. Literally millions of cats end up at animal shelters (or worse—on the street) because their former owners didn’t stop to think about the impact a cat would have on their daily lives. So even though you may be excited, remember that once you bring home your new cat, your life will change.

Some of the changes will be emotional. You get to enjoy the companionship of the cat, but many shelter kitties may require extra love and patience, particularly at first as she adjusts to your home. Your lifestyle will change as well. Cat hair will end up on the furniture and a small furry life now will be depending on you for her very existence. If you are a jet setter,

you no longer can just take off for a couple of weeks without considering the needs of your cat.

The bottom line is that when you get a cat, you will have to make adjustments to your routine, your housekeeping, and your schedule. It's also important to consider the financial realities of pet ownership. Your cat will require food, medical care, and other necessities throughout her life.

If you have children or other pets, you should consider the impact your newly adopted cat will have on their lives. Before you actually start visiting animal shelters, spend some extra time with this section. Try to imagine how life will be different with a cat. This little adoption "reality check" will pay off in the long run for both you and your new kitty.

Should You Get a Cat?

Every spring, adorable kittens seem to appear everywhere. But before you let yourself fall in love, you need to ask yourself a few questions. When you get a cat or kitten you are changing your life for the next 10 to 15 years. Change can be stressful, so think about the ramifications of adding that furry face to your household before you get a pet.

1. Money. Getting a cat costs money. Your new pet needs food and other paraphernalia such as litter, leashes, collars, and toys. Taking your pet to the veterinarian costs more money. It's unfair to the animal to deny him or her these basic needs. If you can't afford the cost of routine upkeep and veterinary care, don't get a pet.

2. Lifestyle. Honestly evaluate the environment you'd be bringing a cat into. Here are a few questions you should ask before you get any pet.

Are you about to make any major life changes, such as having children, moving, marrying, or divorcing?

- Do you travel?
- Does your landlord permit pets?
- Are you away from home all day? If so, do you have time to give a cat the attention it needs?
- Are you healthy?
- Are you allergic to pet hair?
- Do you demand a meticulously clean home?

If you can't meet the animal's needs for any of these reasons, don't get a cat. Millions of animals die in shelters every year because people did not take the time to ask themselves a few basic questions. A pet is not something that should be considered disposable. Like adopting a child, adopting a pet should be for life.

Common Breeds of Cats

When you start looking for a cat, the first thing you may wonder is what breed to get. Realistically, unlike dogs, you don't find many officially purebred cats at animal shelters. However, you do run across the acronyms DSH and DLH a lot. These acronyms stand for "domestic short hair" and "domestic long hair," respectively. Most cats of, shall we say, uncertain ancestry are lumped into these rather general "breed categories."

The "ordinary house cat" is most often a domestic short hair. These mixed-breed (sometimes called "random bred") cats are by far the most popular cats in American homes. Domestic longhaired cats may come in a variety of fur lengths, which