



# Witty Kitties, Inc. Newsletter

A Shelter for Special Needs Cats & Exotic Reptiles \* Vol. XIII, Issue 2 \* Spring 2016



Cinnamon Toast

Snickers

Beau

Cassy

Hank

Libby

## Filling in the Space

by Jenni Doll, DVM

Every few months my serene daily life is interrupted by the cruel command of someone who could be considered Witty Kitties' Grand Overlord. The Grand Overlord insists that some of us who volunteer for the shelter perform the same task, write an article for the next Newsletter. The order used to be given by the former Overlord and Editor of the Newsletter, Dona. But now it is given by Overlord Trish. The change of people in a position of such power hasn't made it easier or harder for me. The one thing I know hasn't changed is the fact that every day after the decree is passed down, I think about what is happening in my life, what is interesting or amusing, what is of importance. But lately what has been happening in my life has been just...sad.

As some of you know, my Mumma dog passed away suddenly in January while I was in Oregon attending the memorial for my brother-in-law, Mike, an utterly funny, talented, and generous man. A month later our sweetest and most sociable llama, Sammy, had to be put down. Two months later, Avon (aka The Most Beautiful Kitten in the World), had to be put down at only a year and a half of age. That was followed by the sudden death of Milly, my little hen whose leg had been amputated last month. She had been doing great hopping about the coop with her sisters. Finally, Avon's "brother," Calvin, died suddenly last week.



The Most Beautiful Kitten in the World

I know, things can even be worse. I am not looking for sympathy because I know every one of us faces loss on a regular basis. As we age I guess it becomes more frequent. I'm healthy and have a wonderful home, job, family. I can't complain.

But my point is that it has been hard to think of a significant incident that could fill a few pages. So I thought I would fill it with what is new and different at Witty Kitties, Inc. and Animals All About, Inc. So here it is.

Last year, Lex tore holes in his super-duper, heavy-duty pond liner when crawling out, due to the pond's depth. We filled it in a little, lined it with the remaining good liner, and then concreted it. Lex's exit from the reptile building to his new pond never went so smoothly as it did this spring. We opened the large garage door, stood on each side of him with a fence panel, and watched him follow Torben (and the chicken he was holding) into the pond. No heaving and pushing and

pulling. It was awesome! I hope the transfer back into the building this fall goes as well.

Sully the tortoise has a new love, Terra, another Sulcata (African spurred thigh tortoise). She arrived in May from a couple who had taken her in from a person who could no

### WITTY KITTIES, INC. MISSION STATEMENT

Founded in 2000, Witty Kitties provides quality care and shelter to cats with specific chronic medical needs within the five-state area we serve. Our organization is committed to collaborating with local humane organizations in rescue work and low-cost spay/neuter services. We provide rescue, care, and appropriate housing for a variety of reptiles, as well. As part of our overall service to the community, Witty Kitties works to educate the public regarding proper care of these companion animals and, ideally, to find permanent, quality homes for them.

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longer care for her. After six months they decided she was a tough one to keep. She has pyramiding of the shell indicating poor diet during her early years, but is a beautiful specimen. Sully really, *really*, **REALLY** thinks so too!

The two are now in Ben the Bear's pen. It didn't take long before Terra started digging what is a fairly deep burrow under Ben's house. Needless to say, even though baby tortoises are incredibly cute, we will need to remove the eggs she plans to lay to avoid hatching.

Speaking of hatching, we also have emu news. Since we've had the emus, each winter the male, Schoonie, built a nest into which the female laid six to twelve eggs. The season was never forgiving, usually January/February, and the choice of nest location was out in the wide open. Schoonie never got up to eat or drink. I typically brought him food. I let him sit on the nest anywhere from a week to 40+ days. I wanted to make sure I didn't take the eggs too soon for fear the female would go ahead and lay more.

This last batch of eggs was different in that it was laid in the spring. The nests in the past few years were at the base of a hill and sheltered by trees. As usual Schoonie dutifully sat on the eggs. Twice to three times a week I brought him water and food. He was always docile with me, which was a change from the aggressive behavior he usually showed me long after I broke up his nests and took his eggs. I've been thumped in the back a few times by him.

Just over a week ago I knew it was at least 45 days, likely more, since seeing him finally settling on the nest and not getting up. I could smell rotten eggs beneath him. Flies



Sully "welcomes" Terra to Witty Kitties

were landing all about. I apologized and reached under him. I grabbed an egg and wondered at how fuzzy it felt. When I pulled it out I was utterly grossed out by the fact that the surface was covered with small maggots. Ewww. I know. Hope you haven't been eating while reading this. I pulled out six eggs. All of them sloshed when shaken and floated in the pail of water I had with me. Thinking I was done, I dug under him again and found towards his front a fuzzy, moving animal. I was startled and pulled my hand out. I decided it had to be a young possum who had come over to eat rotten eggs and found it comfortable. Well, since possums are indeed my favorite animal in the world, I lifted Schoonie up to find the little animal was a striped baby emu! It must have hatched the night before. A second one stood a little stronger. There were just two.

Although we avoid letting reproduction happen here, I admit I am totally thrilled by the prospect of watching these two grow. It is interesting. The mom, Flynnie, is rarely around them. When she is, she attacks them and is then challenged by Schoonie. Both stand up on their tippy toes and stretch their bodies and necks and growl. The female then runs off. The daddy growls more and the babies come running.

We do have some other new birds as well. If you listen to local news you will be familiar with the neglect case in Iowa City that involved 62 ducks left for at least three days in a closed van. I worked the case and will spare you the details. Long story short, all the ducks were adopted, but the adoption of a group of five fell through. Of the 42 surviving ducks, only four were female. I assumed the five we were taking were all males so I said we could take them. (Our 11 Muscovy ducks are all males.)

There are three females in the group of five. Not wanting to inflict the heavy-bodied male Muscovy ducks on the smaller Mallard and Pekin ducks, I figured they needed their own place. The chickens did not like them in their coop at all. So, I put them in probably the safest place I could, the bear enclosure. Yes, Ben never minded when my chickens or the guineas got into his pen last year. The same can be said about his attitude towards the ducks. He has none. The ducks are not especially tame, but if I am not close to the pen they will jump into the kiddie pool they share with Ben and frolic and eat like he was not even there. It is sad that my own back yard is not safe enough for these ducks. Clementine, our dog, has proven that she loves to catch and chew feathered animals.

There are other happenings going on, but I think I've fulfilled the Grand Overlord's wishes by completing my task. I hope this has been at least a bit amusing to you all.

## TNR: A Labor of Love (With a Little Bit of Crazy Mixed In)

by Amy Holcomb

It's no secret that I love cats. I'm sure some people might even think of me as a "crazy cat lady." Not only do I love and adore my cats and all the cats at Witty Kitties, I love every cat I come upon. As I became more involved with Witty Kitties, I learned about TNR, which is when a feral cat is trapped, neutered, and then returned to the location where he or she was trapped. A feral cat is a cat who has either never had any contact with humans or her contact with humans has diminished over time. She is fearful of people and survives on her own outdoors. A feral cat is not likely to ever become a lap cat or enjoy living indoors. Feral cats are usually euthanized if they are taken to a shelter. The shelters don't have space for the cats, they are very unlikely to be adopted, and the cats are terrified in that setting. TNR helps reduce the homeless pet population by sterilizing them.

I had a few feral cats living behind my house in North Liberty several years ago, and I decided to do TNR with them. I offered them shelter and fed them daily upon their return. I then decided it wasn't enough just to trap cats by my house, so I started knocking on doors in my neighborhood, asking people if they wanted me to do TNR with feral cats I had seen at their homes. By then, I had become involved with the Johnson County Humane Society who funded the surgeries of the cats I was trapping.

When the Iowa Humane Alliance Spay/Neuter Clinic opened in Cedar Rapids, I began taking cats there. Cats needed to be dropped off by 7:30 am, so I had to figure out a way to get the cats there that early since I was the one trapping them. I decided the best way was to get up at 4:00 am. That gave me enough time to set the traps, walk my dog, and get ready for work, all in time to drop them off by 7:30 in the morning.

In the spring and summer of 2013 I did this with 11 cats in my neighborhood, and I was sure my work was done. I was exhausted from getting up so early but I was happy I was making a difference. I was planning to retire from the TNR business. Then in the fall of 2013, the Johnson County Humane Society received a call about a large number of feral cats living in Holiday Mobile Home Court in North Liberty. I agreed to check out the situation since I lived nearby. Upon arrival I found two large colonies of feral cats and kittens who were being fed by two nice cat ladies. So I began my TNR routine again- up at 4:00 am to set traps, walk the dog, get ready for work, and transport the cats to Cedar Rapids, all before going to work in Iowa City.

There were so many cats at Holiday that I knew this would be a long project. TNR had become my life. I was trapping cats a few at a time, transporting them to Cedar Rapids and, then picking them up the next day. I was exhausted and could hardly concentrate at work. When I trapped a cat, I felt happiness and joy and when I failed to trap a cat I felt sad and depressed. I began to get through the days by drinking large sugar-free French vanilla iced coffees from McDonald's. I was often worried someone would call the police when I was lurking around setting traps in the dark, but then I realized that no one else was up! I looked longingly at the dark

homes where people were still sleeping. I remember setting traps on a cold, snowy, windy dark November morning, wondering if I had completely lost my mind! I began looking forward to winter, which I hate, because I could get a break from trapping cats!

I started this routine all over again the next spring and the spring after that. I have trapped approxi-

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TNR kitty perched on a train near Holiday Mobil Home Court

## The Untold Truth Behind Declawing

by Nicole Kogan, DVM

[Ed. Note: Dr. Kogan practices vet medicine at the Pet Health Center of Tiffin (phctiffin.com). She met Jenni a couple years ago at a Coralville screening of "The Paw Project" film. Dr. Kogan has helped Witty Kitties' cats on several occasions by providing radiologic services.]

I have always had a fascination with cats and their claws. When I was five years old my mom took me to adopt a kitten after seeing an ad (more of a plea for help) in the paper from a woman who took in three adult cats and two weeks later they all had kittens. Needless to say, there were kittens everywhere of all colors, sizes and shapes. After careful inspection of all the kittens I, of course, was drawn to a small black kitten sitting alone in the corner. This kitten had an upper respiratory infection, green goopy eyes, and matted fur. My mother looked a little shocked and asked if I was sure this was the kitten I wanted. Yes, I was sure. This kitten had the most amazing paws I had ever seen! I named my new friend Ashley.

Ashley had polydactylism or 'double paws.' I could not be more excited about my new friend and couldn't wait to take her home. The next day my mother and I brought Ashley to our veterinarian. I hated going to this place. The sterile odor mixed with cat urine made my eyes water and there was something about the way our pets always seemed to get still and small when they were brought here that made me very wary. My mother assured me that Ashley needed to go, as she was sick. So I reluctantly placed my little kitten on the cold metal table. The veterinarian gave us some eye drops and some bright pink antibiotic drops to give to Ashley to help her clear the infection. He then looked at her paws and told my mom that Ashley would need to be spayed and declawed in three months. He told us that with all those extra toes she would really shred our house up. I looked this scary man right in the eye and said the only word I have even spoken to him, "No."

Was this man insane?! Did he not see those amazing toes? Had he never seen a cat ever so casually climb a tree? Something, which by the way, I always wished I could do so easily. And besides that, it sounded so painful. I could not imagine putting my new friend through that.

Later that day after I had calmed down a little, my mom told me she was very proud of me. She then told me about when she was little and her very first cat was declawed. She said she and her mother just did not know any better and so they trusted their veterinarian. Why would you not? Aren't these people here to help keep our pets safe and free of pain and discomfort? I was very confused by why these veterinarians were doing this to our little furry friends. It was around this time, at the age of just five, that I decided to become a veterinarian so that I could truly help people with their pets and not offer things that I knew to be wrong and unjust to animals.

I really wish I could say that I never performed this barbaric surgery on a cat. But sadly, I cannot. My first job out of vet school landed me at a low cost spay/neuter clinic in Long Island, New York. This place seemed perfect for me. It seemed that it was more about doing right by the animals and less about the money. During my first week I



found this not to be the case at all. In order to actually make a huge profit, this group also offered discount declaws, or digital amputations, as I now knew the true medical term for

this procedure. I felt bullied into performing this terrible procedure by my peers, as I was so new out of school and did not want to seem like some kind of bleeding-heart-save-them-all-vet. They laughed at me and told me I would eventually become numb to it and besides, we make so much money with this surgery that it would be crazy not to do it.

A digital amputation on one cat can cost anywhere from \$120-\$500, depending on where you go. This

does not include the additional cost of pain medications or antibiotics in case things go bad and the paws get all infected. The procedure takes on average 5-10 minutes, depending on the technique and veterinarian doing the procedure. So let's think about this. If we are doing digital amputations on five cats per day, that's anywhere from \$600-\$2,500 a day for less than an hour's worth of work, with almost 100% profit. Yes, this did sound like easy money, but it did not change the fact that I wanted to vomit every time I did one of these digital amputations. After three weeks of this I found myself performing a digital amputation and there were tears running down my cheeks. After this I told my boss no more. She said this was fine by her but that I was going to lose a lot of money. I said fine by me! I will never declaw another cat unless it is 100% medically necessary for the patient. And yes, I will try to save them all, thank you very much.



I do not want to paint a picture of all veterinarians who offer digital amputations as money hungry, unethical people. I believe some veterinarians think they are doing the right thing by their feline patients, thinking that if they don't do the surgery someone else will. Or my favorite, if I don't declaw this cat its owners will get rid of the cat. Well, numerous studies have shown that the owners who have little tolerance for cats and their claws also have little tolerance for other cat things such as cat fur and cat litter boxes. There are actually a large number of cats in shelters due to the above fact (what fact?) and also due to the fact that after a two- or four-paw digital amputation, most felines suffer chronic pain which shows up in various ways: increased aggression/biting, hiding, urination/defecation outside the litter box, and obesity, to name just a few.

In most of Europe and parts of Canada, Australia, and even in several cities in California, declawing is illegal. Here is Ireland's official veterinary position statement on declawing cats:

Declawing is where the entire third phalanx (last bone), including the claw (nail) of all of the digits, are surgically removed. This is done so that the animal will not damage furniture during its normal behaviour of attempting to sharpen and maintain its nails (essential for hunting for food and defence). Clearly this act of mutilation derives no net benefit to the cat and is only done for the benefit of the owner. In actual fact this procedure leaves a cat defenceless in the face of an attack by another cat and it therefore is recommended that cats that have had this procedure performed upon them be kept inside for life. It is a very painful procedure requiring intensive pain relief and bandaging for several days to weeks. While commonly performed in the USA it is not performed in Ireland and any Veterinary Practitioner performing this act would clearly be open to disciplinary action by the Veterinary Council of Ireland.

Some alternatives to declawing cats include applying Soft Paws, providing areas for your cat to scratch, and routine nail trims. Soft Paws (softpaws.com) are small, soft, rubber caps that are glued to the nails once every 4-6 weeks. The caps prevent unwanted scratching while allowing your cat to keep her digits. To find a scratching surface that your cat will love, observe where your cats likes to scratch and then provide a similar surface for them. For instance, if your cat prefers vertical surfaces, provide a vertical scratching post which is at least as tall as your cat when she is standing on her back legs reaching up (this is usually 3+ feet for the average cat). Cats also like a variety of surfaces, so offer corrugated cardboard, wood, carpet etc. to see which your feline enjoys most. Most cats will need their nails trimmed every one to two months. Your veterinarian or groomer should be able to help you with this and most veterinarians will even give you a lesson so that you can learn to trim your cat's nails at home.

For more information on ways to avoid declawing your cat and for ways to live in harmony with your feline friend and her claws, please visit these websites for some really fun ideas:

[www.declawing.com/cat-declawing-alternatives](http://www.declawing.com/cat-declawing-alternatives)

[www.playfulkitty.net/2014/09/22/5-humane-alternatives-declawing-cats/](http://www.playfulkitty.net/2014/09/22/5-humane-alternatives-declawing-cats/)

The Paw Project (Jenni Doll is the Iowa Director) has a really good website (pawproject.org) that describes ways you can make this barbaric procedure a thing of the past and help our wonderful country catch up to most of the European countries.



(Continued from page 3)

mately 97 cats since I started this madness. There has been a huge reduction in the number of cats who need to be trapped at these two colonies in Holiday Mobile Home Court. There are only a handful of trap savvy mama cats (and now their spring kittens) who still need to be trapped. I am no longer getting up early to set traps. Instead, I am attempting to trap them in the evenings when I can target the cats who need to be trapped.

I have also expanded my trapping to a gas station in North Liberty. For a while, I was stalking a couple cats at a bank in North Liberty trying to figure out when they were there so I could trap them. One night I found a black cat at the bank. He seemed to be waiting for me. I set the trap, baited it with sardines, and waited to trap him. I knew this would be an easy cat to trap. So, I waited and waited for him to go into the trap. I watched him walk halfway in and eat the trail of food that led to the trip plate, and then he backed out. I watched him lay at the opening of the trap staring at me. I am pretty sure I saw a smile on his face. He eventually moseyed across the parking lot, walked under my car, and sat on a picnic table, where he continued to stare at me. It was then past 9:00 at night, so I gave up. I picked up my trap, set food out,



The brown trap with typical TNR contents

and went home. Smarty Pants had won that battle, but I would not give up on him! I realized shortly after that night that he was one of the cats living off and on at the gas station where I had trapped four cats and had been feeding them for months. I suppose one of the cats there told him to watch out for the blond lady with the brown trap. I see a drop trap at the gas station in Smarty Pants' future.

One might wonder why I put myself through this. When I start to question this myself, I am given energy and inspiration by remembering that I am reducing the homeless cat population, and that even though I might not catch every cat, I have made a huge difference to the cats I have caught. I am inspired by many people who

have been doing this a lot longer than I have, including Mary Blount, founder of the Iowa Humane Alliance Spay/Neuter Clinic, Witty Kitties' own Dr. Jenni Doll who has dedicated her life to helping cats, and my friend Angela Brubaker, who was doing TNR before anyone else knew what TNR was, to name just a few. There are a huge group of us who are working together to make the lives of all cats better, and I am proud to be part of that group, which is what keeps me going (along with a cappuccino from Casey's or an iced coffee from McDonald's).

## We're on [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com)!!

Do you shop on amazon.com? Do you know about its "sister" website called [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com)? It's the easiest way yet to support Witty Kitties by doing something you were going to do anyway — purchase a product from Amazon!



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Here's how to make that happen. Go to [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com), and look for the word "Supporting," in orange, underneath the Amazon search box. A default charity will be listed — simply click on the arrow next to the listed charity and change it to Witty Kitties, Inc. [Smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) will remember your selection, and every eligible purchase you make in the future will result in a donation to Witty Kitties. Check it out — and thanks!

# Memorials and Honorariums

In memory of my father, **Glenn Hykes**, and his two cats, Oliver and Sammy, by Carolyn Devick, Gilman, IA

In memory of **Cheddar**, our wonderful orange kitty, by Jim and Berni Doll, Richmond, MN

In memory of **Avon**, the most beautiful cat in the world, all 24 toes will be missed, by Jenni Doll

In memory of **Malachi**, beloved cat of Debra Lee, with our deepest sympathy and love, Shari & Tom Hivko

In honor of **Chipotle** and the staff at **All Pets Veterinary Clinic** in Iowa City, by Andrea Keech, Iowa City

In memory of **David Crombie**, Margalea Warner's brother, by Roger & Martha Klein

In memory of a cat named **Malachi**, who loved everyone and who was loved by everyone, by Debra Lee, Iowa City

In memory of witty kitty **Smokey**, by Jeri McGillicuddy, Cedar Rapids

In memory of **Angel**, he deserved every bit of love and care he got during his short life, by Joani Napier, Cherokee, IA

In memory of **Indigo**, the cat who thought he was a dog, and best friend to Darren, Alice, Christopher, Hannah, Lauren & Matthew Pittman, Aunt Dona (Pearce), Muscatine

In memory of **Bunny** and **Lyla**, so loved by Teresa Kopel & Tom Smith, by Lisa Drahozal Pooley, Iowa City

In memory of **Rosie**, beloved cat of Margaret Bradow, by Jo & Roger Rayborn, Cedar Rapids

In honor of **Witty Kitties**, by Margie Sims, Cedar Rapids

In memory of my brother, **David Crombie**, by Margalea Warner, Coralville

David Crombie, of Arlington, VA, a supporter of Witty Kitties for many years, died unexpectedly in his home last winter. You may recall seeing David's frequent memorials to his mother, Eleanor Louise Brown, in this column. David's sister, Margalea Warner, of Coralville (and mom to Millie, a former witty kitty), recently sent us David's final donation, along with some memories...



Eleanor Brown, David Crombie, Margalea Warner, circa 1983

When we were kids, our mother, who was allergic to cats, allowed us to have a cat as long as we made sure she stayed out of mom's bedroom and off mom's pillow. Of course, our new cat made a beeline straight for mom's room and pillow whenever she got the chance. Caught in the act, she would stare wide-eyed at mom, as if to say, "who, me?" And that's how she got her name! Mom even took one of her cardboard cutting boards to block the door, but WhoMe? jumped over it. As she aged, WhoMe? got less mischievous. She lived to be 18 years old and she died while I was in college. David put her in one of our grandfather's small suitcases and buried her in a park, where we later scattered our mom's ashes. David's foster son is planning to scatter David's ashes there too.



WhoMe?

Every little bit helps. Visit [wittykitties.org](http://wittykitties.org) to donate via PayPal.



Witty Kitties, Inc.  
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### *Donating to Witty Kitties*

Want to honor or memorialize a family member, friend, or beloved pet? You will help support the work we do at Witty Kitties! Just complete this form and mail your check to Witty Kitties, Inc., 3133 Roberts Ferry Rd, Solon, IA 52333.

**Your donation is tax deductible.** We'll publish your memorial or honorarium in the next issue and send a copy of the newsletter to the person or family you are honoring or memorializing.

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Spring, 2016