



# Witty Kitties, Inc. Newsletter

A Shelter for Special Needs Cats & Exotic Reptiles \* Vol. XI, Issue 1 \* Summer 2014



Cinnamon Toast

Faith

Chester

Neko

Oscar

Jazzy

## 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.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jenni Doll, DVM, President  
Torben Platt, the Reptile Guy  
Kathleen Schoon, Volunteer Coordinator  
Trish Wasek, Webmaster  
John McLaughlin, Infrastructure  
Amy Holcomb, Facebook Coordinator  
Maggy Tomova

## DID YOU KNOW?

*You could see this issue in living color if you subscribed to an email copy of the newsletter! Let us know your wishes by emailing [staff@wittykitties.org](mailto:staff@wittykitties.org).*



### LILLIAN

*This little doll has been waiting for over three years for her forever family to find her. She is in very good health despite her FIV+ status. Check her out on our website - click on Meet the Kitties, FIV group.*

## Frenemies

by Jenni Doll, DVM

“No good deed is left unpunished.” That’s the truth.

I find myself wondering why I do things I feel are “nice” at the time, only to have it bite me in the butt later. The “nice” thing I have in mind is the rehabilitation Torben and I did of so many baby raccoons back in the BK (Before Kirsten) days. I know I’ve told stories in the past of the fun of having hungry baby coons crawling up my bare legs to get their food, taking some on a camping trip in the VW we had, and discovering one knew how to flush the toilet.

They are some amusing stories that seemed to be just that at the time, amusing.

I think those same raccoons (more likely their offspring’s offspring) are returning the favor in their special way. “Hey, Jenni! You did such a great job. Look what we can do!”

Up until about two weeks ago I had a big fat red hen and two little silkie hens sharing a big nest full of eggs in the hutch right off the side of our deck. They were pretty diligent, and were protective of the clutch. One morning while doing chores, I noticed they were gone, as were the eggs, at least a dozen. I thought maybe Torben had taken the eggs to feed to the coyotes or bear, thus causing the hens to leave. Not something I would have expected Torben to do, but that was wishful thinking.

It was minutes later when I discovered a wing of the big fat hen in the yard. A few bloody fluffs scattered about were all that was left of the silkies. I was pretty peeved. First, because I love my hens and fresh eggs. Two, I have over 30 Muscovy ducks in nests all around the yard, none of which had been touched. (I don’t wish ill on my

ducks. But if one has to go I would opt for them over my few chickens.)

The next few nights were fine. Some of the remaining chickens roost on our deck just outside the window, and the others in a large pen I can close easily.

But the coonies are awfully brave. The second I came out a few mornings later I noticed bits and pieces of evidence. They were the parts of another hen. I looked around and surely came up short on my head count. I also noticed all the eggs from an abandoned duck nest in our front yard were gone, and my new bunny in the front yard was badly wounded.

So, I now have to pick up the remaining chickens off the deck railings to lock up with the others, and put my bunny in a hutch at night. As I do this I always have to beware the male emu who is completely out to get me. I am the only human he consistently attacks, pecking and high kicks a daily nuisance. If I raise my hands and stand my ground he usually backs off. It works better though if I have something in my hands. But that something shouldn’t be a live chicken or rabbit. It is a chore making sure he is distracted when I’m making the few trips to the pen from the house. He is a very unappreciative bird, over 100 lbs with a brain not bigger than a chicken’s. Where was he when my chickens were getting slaughtered?! A watch-emu he is not.

Many folks would say “Why not trap and release them elsewhere? Or shoot them?” I shudder to think of a story a man once told me about how he “took care of” a raccoon that was getting into his garage rafters. It involved a garbage can and fire. He laughed his head off while I kept saying “you can stop now.” Had I known his story was going to be so bad I would have walked out of the store we were in.

*(Continued on page 2)*

## Thanks, Dona!

They say all good things must come to an end, and this was a *really* good thing. For the past ten years, Dona Pearce has been the President of our Board of Directors and newsletter editor. She greeted many of you at our annual fundraisers, and, in spite of allergies, chipped in at many a spring cleaning day.



Dona says: "I know I always said I would hang in there until Witty Kitties is no more, but I have some other things I want to pursue now, so I'm cutting back on my volunteer work. I have been proud to have been a part of Witty Kitties, and to help the animals who literally have nowhere else to go."

We are fortunate to have had Dona's expertise for so many years. And we can guess what might be filling some of her well-deserved, new free time. Her name is Ava, and she's the apple of grammy's eye! More trips out to the east coast are surely on Dona's agenda.

Thanks for everything, Dona. We'll miss you cracking your editorial whip!

(Frenemies. Continued from page 1)

I don't feel right about that. I think if you live in the country, even in a residential area, you should expect animals as part of the package. I was slow in finally deciding I had to put an effort into ensuring the rest of my prey animals are safe at night. It is a nuisance, but not difficult. It isn't much different than living in the country and letting my yard be whatever natural plant cover wants to grow. I happen to like dandelions, wild violets, and Creeping Charlie. My yard need not look like Astroturf, not that my animals would allow that. If I wanted that I would live on a golf course.

So, I rest easy on the fact that we must have done something right in raising those little raccoons. They have multiplied and thrived well enough to put my mind at ease. I guess.

## Maggy Tomova Joins the Board

Maggy Tomova, of Iowa City, joined the Witty Kitties Board of Directors following Dona's resignation. Maggy discovered Witty Kitties after she rescued an injured cat, Vince, on New Year's Eve, 2009. Maggy started volunteering to help with Vince and quickly became hooked! Vince was adopted a year later, but Maggy had already fallen in love with another badly injured witty kitty named Cyrano. She's truly a softy for pathetic looking, beat up cats. In her non-cat life, Maggy is an assistant professor of mathematics at the U of I.



## Volunteer Corner

### On Becoming a Cat Person

by Jane Gressang

Most people that I know who like pets define themselves as either a "cat person" or a "dog person." Obviously these are not the only two pet options, but if someone has chosen one of these labels, they usually deny that the other one applies to them. This being true, once upon a time, I definitely would have called myself a "dog person," while also meaning *not* a "cat person."

Unlike many Witty Kitties volunteers, I don't have a pet cat, and I never have. When I was growing up, my family always had a dog. When I was born, my parents had a 6-month-old Airedale puppy. In

retrospect, it seems crazy to have a baby and a puppy in the house at the same time, but that's my parents! Anyway, Jiggs the Airedale saw me as an annoying younger puppy, and he would try to entertain me and watch out for me. Growing up with Jiggs definitely made me define myself as a "dog person," and I never really thought back then that I could be a "cat person." I mean, Jiggs hated cats. I think he found their existence to be a personal insult (probably because a neighbor cat liked to torment him by demonstrating how easily a cat could get out of our fenced-in yard while Jiggs was—*usually*—stuck inside).

Of course, when I was growing up, I did have pets other than dogs. When my older brother and I could convince my parents that it was not a terrible idea (which honestly wasn't that hard—see crazy-sounding from earlier), we had fish, gerbils, a parakeet, an anole lizard, hermit crabs, and guinea pigs. (Jiggs was very jealous of the parakeet, but oddly didn't mind the gerbils

or the guinea pigs.) We never had cats, though.

Later, when I was in college, my friend Vicki got a cat named Beatrice. I think I was surprised that she had gotten a cat because, like me, she had only had dogs when we were little. I mean, the cat wasn't going to let her walk it, right? (Prove me wrong, Valentine! Although you have lost a lot of weight, I still haven't seen you walk around on your harness!) If you couldn't take the cat for walks, what was the point? Clearly I still had not discovered the joy of cats.

After college, when I finally lived in a non-rented place where I could have pets again, I was already married and desperately wanted to have some pets of my own again, but probably not a cat. My husband truly loves animals, but unfortunately, he is allergic to almost any pet mammal that has hair, and he is most allergic to cats. As

(Continued on page 4)

## The Devil in Name Only

by Jenni Doll, DVM

Anyone who has attended a reptile talk given by Torben has surely seen our Burmese Python, Lucifer. An awfully big snake when we got him, Lucifer achieved a length of just over 15 feet, nowhere near the maximum for the species, but big by Iowa standards.

Lucifer came from a young couple in their late teens who lived near Des Moines and got mixed up in a drug raid. I am not sure of the details anymore, but they had to get rid of their "watch-snake." It was 2001 or 2002 (Torben would remember, but is too sad to help me write this). I remember meeting them at a gas station just outside of Des Moines, seeing the huge Rubbermaid container, wondering why it had to be so big. The couple seemed so young, yet old at the same time. I had a feeling they struggled much of their life just to exist.



Lucifer in his prime 7 years ago

So when I saw Torben take out \$100 and give it to the girl, I didn't argue. We were getting the snake with or without the money, so I don't feel he was a purchase in any way.

Lucifer was the first huge snake I ever dealt with. Slow-moving most of the time, I was shocked at how quick he could be when snapping up a meal from the end of the long tongs Torben held.

Snakes don't show expression, happiness, fear, anger. They just have a hard wired life of "stay warm, sleep, eat, shed, poop." That's about it. So it is hard to imagine how attached we, especially Torben, were to him.

Lucifer is the only snake (large and small) we were able to trust whole heartedly out in public. He was conditioned to not expect food if out and about, and if handled gently,

would glide slowly over the grass, around people's legs, or through their arms if being held.

It is a fact that thanks to Lucifer many people who had a horrible fear of snakes were able to touch Lucifer without having heart attacks. I think the fact that he never slithered about quickly was helpful. People marveled at his iridescent sheen, the smooth scales, and pure muscle of his body.

Lucifer tolerated the trips into and out of the Rubbermaid container (a much bigger one than the one I saw on the first day we got him), being kept hostage while large numbers of people stroked him, or held him up for a group picture. There was always at least one person who suddenly let go of the portion of Lucifer he or she was holding, leaving a part of his body dangling. He didn't seem affected.

In the last two years he began developing small tumors over his body, and ate less and less (always rabbits). I could feel a laxity to his skin, and sometimes felt his vertebrae cracking. He was as old as he would get. It was only a matter of time before he would be gone. After rejecting food at 3 consecutive feedings Torben asked me to put him down. Who knows how long he would have lingered. We don't know if he suffered any discomfort in letting himself not eat, but we didn't know he wasn't in discomfort either. So we helped him along.

I euthanized Lucifer a few weeks ago when Torben was at work. It was quicker and smoother than I expected. As I put him into his Rubbermaid for the last time I marveled at what little space he occupied in it. He was much lighter than I expected.

I buried Lucifer not far from the house. I didn't want Torben to have to see him again.

If you aren't familiar with snakes it may not make sense, but when they are dead they look as alive as they had been. Snakes don't have eyelids that close, so are perpetually "awake" looking. It was a bit unnerving to put him into a hole and bury him. At any rate, he did not have to linger about, feeling whatever he was feeling that made him not want, or be able, to eat.

The down side of Lucifer's mellow nature is that I have had my share of run ins with other large snakes, always shocked and offended when bitten and wrapped up (We all know the story of the 12 foot python that got me



Kids loved him

while pregnant with Kirsten). When opening Lucifer's cage I never had to tap his head, or shield myself, in case the snake was expecting a meal. Herpers (aka reptile people) with time and space will actually put a snake into a separate cage for feedings, to avoid the excitement they might have every time the cage door is opened. My guard is never down with even the smallest snakes. I've learned, sometimes the hard way, that Lucifer was a once-in-a-lifetime find.

Last week Trish, John, Kirsten, and I gave a talk to a few boy scout troops at their spring picnic. It was our first time without Lucifer. I was sad. Earlier in the evening we tested the "moods" of a few snakes, deciding who would be most tolerant of handling. I was pleasantly surprised by how well the young albino Burmese Python (shall we name her Lucy-fer?) did. I had an adult managing her during the petting portion of the night. She stayed calm.

But I am not going to kid myself that we have another snake we will be able to relax with. We aren't that lucky. I am just glad a big guy like Lucifer could enter, even for those short moments, into the lives of people who may never get to experience the likes of him again.

RIP Lucifer.



(On *Becoming a Cat Person*, continued from page 2)

a compromise, right after we were first married we got three tiny hermit crabs. While hermit crabs can live up to 25 years, these poor babies didn't have much of a chance of that. We learned that our crabs were probably sold to us when they were too small. After some fatal fights over the one shell that they *all* wanted to live in (seriously, we had so many options, but that one was the only one they wanted!) and some heart-wrenching molting traumas, our little baby crabs were no more and I was petless again. Also, I was still no closer to being a cat-lover.

About six years ago, and I honestly can't remember how it happened (understanding *why* is easy—he really loves me and wants me to be happy!), my husband foolishly agreed to let me have a guinea pig in our house. (Allergy medication was necessary!) I think he would have changed his mind if he had known that allowing me to adopt one guinea pig from the Iowa City Animal Shelter would later balloon into our having four adopted guinea pigs whose cages take up most of our dining room because they can't all live together. Obviously guinea pigs are not cats, but having the guinea pigs be the focus of my pet-owning started to prepare me to be a “cat person.”

How is that possible? Well, first of all, it helped me define myself as not just a “dog person.” Secondly, though you wouldn't think it could be true, guinea pigs and cats have certain things in common. For example, sometimes guinea pigs fight. Any



Butterscotch



Napoleon

Witty Kitties volunteer has seen a couple of cats scuffle when, for example, food or attention or a spot on the couch is at stake. Well, my male guinea pigs Casper and Napoleon have to live apart because they fight when they share space. Before Napoleon came to live with us, I had read that you can house two unrelated male guinea pigs in the same cage if one is young when you introduce them. Napoleon was still

a baby when I adopted him, but guess what? He is named Napoleon for a reason. He has a huge personality and likes to fight with Casper even though Casper is still bigger.

Guinea pig fighting, by the way, is opening your jaws as wide as possible to show your crazy sharp incisors and then lashing out to bite at an opportune moment. My experiment of trying to keep Napoleon and Casper together ended after I was bitten when I forgot to wear oven mitts while



Coconut

trying to separate the two. My husband still complains about Napoleon biting his foot during this time period. I don't see how Napoleon can truly be blamed, though. Casper is almost all white and the size of a foot. My husband was wearing white socks, and Napoleon was just trying to prove himself to my husband's Casper-shaped and colored foot.

Guinea pigs also purr when they are happy. My female guinea pigs, Coconut and

Butterscotch, live together mostly in harmony. Butterscotch is Coconut's mother, even though Coconut looks about twice her size. It is true that no sweet family sentiment will stop Coconut from trying to steal veggie treats out of her mother's mouth. Coconut isn't often successful because Butterscotch swings her carrot, apple, or cucumber pieces around like swords right after she gets them to try to ward off any theft. That is really the most they fight, though, and if I am holding one and put her back in the cage, they walk up to each other and purr to say “There you are! I missed you.” So the guinea pigs prepared me to respond positively to cat purring!



Casper

Other than that, I think you know what made me a “cat person,” or at least no longer solely a “dog person.” The cats at Witty Kitties are amazing!! It's hard not to look at each one on Sunday nights when I clean (mostly pet, but also clean) and think,

“You are so awesome! Why aren't you adopted and home with some loving family right now?” I am so grateful that a friend suggested that I try volunteering at Witty Kitties when I was looking for something new to get involved in. The cats all have such fun, interesting, individual personalities. Even the not-so-cuddly ones are great because they are unique and intelligent. After spending even 10 minutes in Witty Kitties, I don't understand how anyone could think that cats are not affectionate. Bob in Room 2 would be willing to sit on anyone's lap and purr until he or she were convinced otherwise.

Even sweeter than the cats at Witty Kitties, though, are the other volunteers. When you are personally involved, you'll see how amazing it is to have so many people committed to an idea like Witty Kitties.

Every little bit helps... Donate on our homepage, [wittykitties.org](http://wittykitties.org)



✂️ *Clip and save on your fridge!!*



**8th Annual  
Witty Kitties  
Fur Fest  
Fundraiser**

Free Will Donations  
Appreciated

*Bring the Kids!*

**WHEN:  
Saturday, August 2  
4-7 pm**

**WHERE:  
Witty Kitties, Inc.  
3133 Roberts Ferry Rd, Solon  
Just southeast of 'downtown' Shueyville  
(get directions on our website's Contact Us page)**



Bring your camera - get up close and personal with:  
**Ben the Bear - Lucy the Python  
Sully the Tortoise - Snickers the Cat**



- \* SILENT AUCTION \* CRAFTS \*
- \* FACE PAINTING \* MUSIC \*
- \* SNACKS & BEVERAGES \*

For more info: [www.wittykitties.org](http://www.wittykitties.org)



### HAPPY ADOPTIONS!!



*All 6-year-old Alex Reyes, of Marion, wanted for Christmas was a kitten. He must have been a very good boy—Santa delivered two, Cleo & Ollie (aka Biscuit & Shoe). Their mom, Cornbread, and sister, Small Fry, remain at Witty Kitties waiting to find their forever home. See them at [www.wittykitties.org/id266.html](http://www.wittykitties.org/id266.html).*



*Emilie Therrien, of Mt. Vernon, adopted Chuck, above, and Scorsese, both FIV+ and huge favorites with our volunteers. We'll miss them but we're so happy too!*



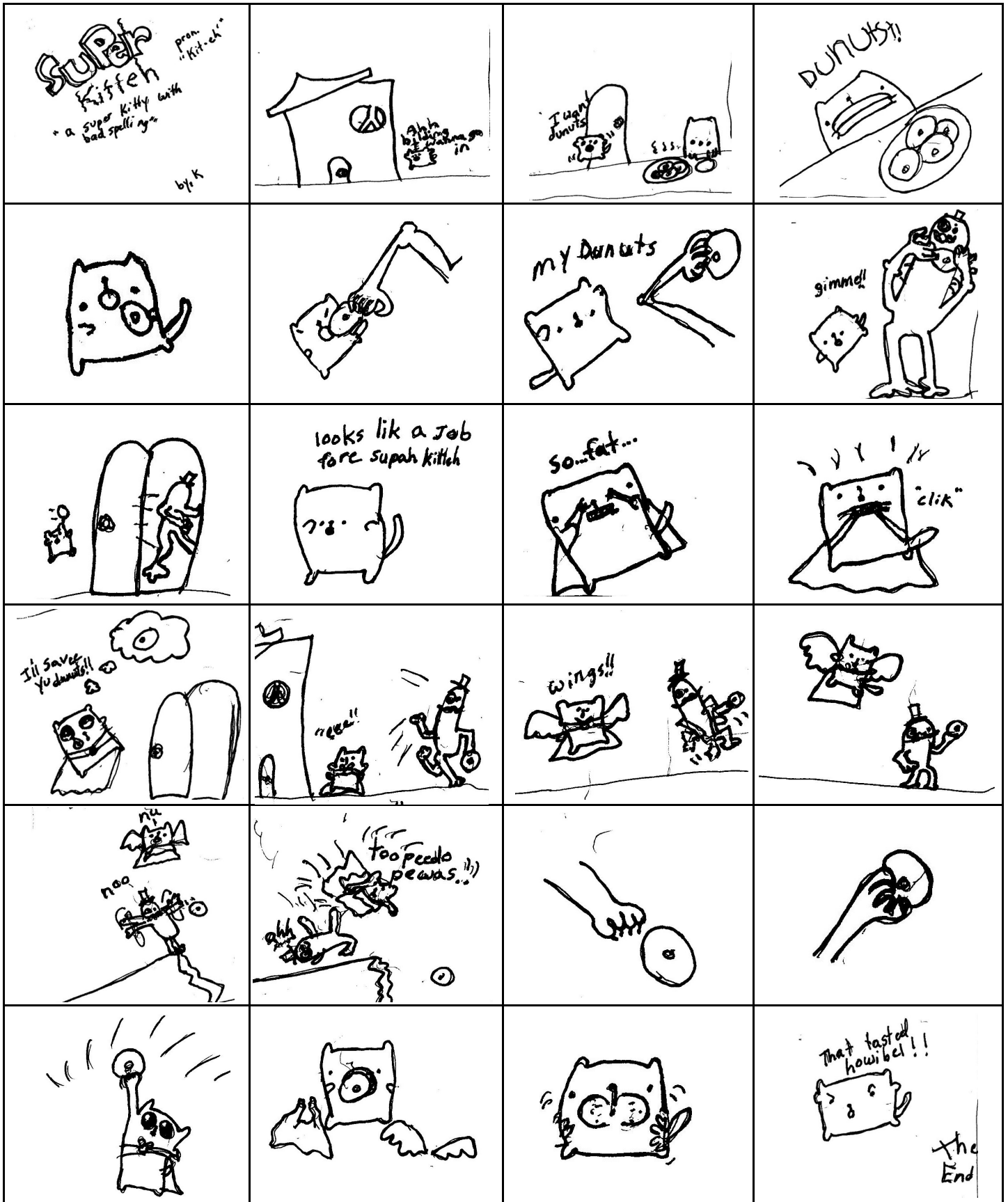
*An avid animal lover and Witty Kitties volunteer, Cynthia Holcomb adopted Timmy when she moved into her own apartment in North Liberty.*



### Scouts Visit Again!

For the second year in a row, Girl Scout troop 5159, from Wickham Elementary School in Iowa City, visited and donated lots of wonderful goodies, everything from cleaning supplies to litter. L-R: Zola Gross, Melody Hoffman, Audrey Bell, Shawna Bailey, Anna Randle, Ava Reed, Elisabeth Bird, Abbey Turner, Ben Turner, and Sydney Kepros. THANKS, GIRLS!!

# Kirsten's Corner (er, better make that Page), by Kirsten Platt, age 9



## Memorials and Honorariums

In memory of **Betty Pittman**, by Dana Pittman, Letts, IA

In memory of **Ruth Lerdal**, a friend of felines for 99 years, by Ronnye & Dennis Wieland, North Liberty, IA

In loving memory of my daughter, **Nancy Fultz**, by Judy Nudson, Topeka, KS

In memory of my late husband, **Thomas C Noth**, by Ruth Noth, Cedar Rapids

In memory of my late husband, **Don Sims**, by Margie Sims, Cedar Rapids

In memory of **Herman Hummer**, beloved pet of Bill & Nita Hatt, by Jeff & Yvonne Monk, Kent, WA. We are sorry for your loss. He was small but mighty!

In memory of **Phantom**, beloved kitty of Bill & Kathy Hicklin, Solon, by Lisa & Bill McKirgan, Cedar Rapids

In memory of **Max**, a very loving lap cat who received so much love in the short time he was with Lee & Butch Kopecky, Cedar Rapids, by Kandi & Rich Herb, Cedar Rapids

In memory of Jenni's dog **Tootsie**, by Stacy Dykema, Cedar Rapids

In honor of **Nancy Peters**, North Liberty, and in memory of **Dave**, her rescued FeLV+ kitty, who left Witty Kitties far too soon, by Trish Wasek, Swisher

In honor of witty kitty **Pitch**, by Ginny Guyman, Kansas City, KS

In honor of **Mason Swager**, by Lloyd & Sandy Swager, Racine, WI

In memory of our dog **Samson**, by Sandra & Glenn Fults, Swisher

In memory of former witty kitty **Barney**, adopted and loved by Evelyn Thomson, Merion Station, PA

In memory of **Nancy Fultz**, she will be greatly missed, by Charles Key, Glendale, AZ

In memory of **Lucy and Sophia**, our kitties who crossed 12/12 and 2/13, by Roger & Laurie Stone, Cedar Rapids

In memory of **Nancy Fultz**, Surprise, AZ, one of the most generous and kind-hearted individuals I have ever met. She will be very missed, not only by the humans, but by the many animals that she has helped. By Paulette Halle, Sun City West, AZ

In honor of **Lora Schmoll** (Happy Birthday!) by Kim O'Meara, Cedar Rapids

In memory of **Henry**, Kirsten's witty kitty, who loved her best of all, by John McLaughlin & Trish Wasek, Swisher

In memory of our mother, **Eleanor Louise Brown**, and in honor of all our furspersons, including Who Me, Taz, Chester, and Millie, by Margalea Warner, Coralville

In memory of **Mummsie**, beloved cat of Don & Sue Novak, by Jim & Gerry Buttlerman, Cedar Rapids

In loving memory of **James Bond Jr**, beloved kitty of Evan O'Meara, by Andrea Gabbard & Francey Ruth Blaugrund, Oakhurst, CA

In memory of our sweet baby girl **Felicia**. We remember her as a fine acrobat and a mighty hunter of strings and cat treats. She was strong willed, very loving, and a fighter to the end. We loved her a lot and miss her every day. By Amy, Cynthia, and Shadow Holcomb, North Liberty

In memory of **Tootsie**, the cutest and naughtiest little dog ever, by Jenni Doll

In memory of **Meow**, barn princess, house queen, and beloved kitty of Marge McGowan, by Lois James, Iowa City, and Ronnye Wieland, North Liberty

In honor of my niece, **Cynthia Adhikari**, by Alice Smith, Cedar Rapids

In memory of our uncle, **Bob Schilling**, Albuquerque, NM, by Joe & Linda Skvor, Marion

In memory of **Eleanor Louise Brown**, by David Crombie, Arlington, VA

In memory of **Zippy**, Beth Pennell's lightning quick kitty, who left this world unexpectedly and way too early, by the Witty Kitties Board of Directors

In memory of **Henry the Cat** and in honor of his girl, **Kirsten Platt**, by Jenni Doll



## Remembering Nancy

*Nancy Fultz, a long-time Witty Kitties' volunteer, passed away at age 51 on January 24, 2014 in Surprise, Arizona. We were heart-broken when we heard the news.*

*Nancy moved to Iowa for a short time in 2007, and she started looking for just the right shelter to volunteer at. Lucky for us, she found Witty Kitties, and we've been feeling her impact ever since.*

*It was Nancy's idea to put short videos of all the cats on our website. One day she went around the shelter and took videos of nearly every cat — a labor of love! Ever since, we've been taking videos as each kitty arrives and posting them on our website.*

*Unable to sell her house in Arizona, Nancy eventually had to return, but she continued to support Witty Kitties. She came up with the idea for our Christmas mailing and coordinated the first one from Arizona. Nancy was also a talented artist and donated dozens of hand-crafted items for our fundraisers. It was so much fun opening her packages each year to see her new creations!*

*Even after Nancy entered hospice care, she continued to send donations from her jewelry sales. Her sister, Teri, told us that she and her mom will continue to sell Nancy's artwork and donate the proceeds to Witty Kitties, at Nancy's request.*

*Nancy was unbelievably generous with her time and talents. We will miss her dearly.*

Witty Kitties, Inc.  
 3133 Roberts Ferry Rd.  
 Solon, IA 52333

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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.

No stamp? No problem! Give via PayPal—just click on the PayPal icon on our home page, wittykitties.org.

Gift: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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Summer 2014