

**SAMPLER**

The

**ULTIMATE**

**CAT**  
*lover*

**The Best Experts' Advice  
for a Happy, Healthy Cat  
with Stories and Photos  
of Fabulous Felines**



**Marty Becker, D.V.M.,** America's Favorite Vet  
Carol Kline, Gina Spadafori, and Mikkel Becker

# EXCLUSIVE

ABC-TV's "Good Morning America" and  
Dr. Marty Becker invites you to enjoy this  
sampler from The Ultimate Cat Lover

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"Kittens know they're cute." © Troy Snow

"The instincts of the hunter . . ." © Troy Snow

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Kittens know  
they're cute.  
Always.





# ¡Caliente!

*By Marty Becker, D.V.M.*

I was catching up on paperwork one summer evening at my southern Idaho veterinary hospital when suddenly I heard a loud pounding on the back door. Startled and a little alarmed, I peeked out the window of the office door. There on the steps was a Hispanic couple and their two children. The mother held a box, and the father carried something bundled in a blanket, but no animal was visible.

Reading the urgency in their body language, I opened the door and was overcome by the smell of smoke and a cacophony of explanations that, with only two years of high school Spanish, I couldn't begin to decipher. The man held the bundle out to me. I lifted the edge of the blanket and saw a badly burned cat lying on her side. The skin on the bottom of her foot pads was hanging in charred strips, much of the fur on her head and neck and all of her whiskers were burned off, and she was squinting from the pain of her burned corneas. I also noticed she had enlarged teats, which gave me a good indication of what was in the box the woman held.

Dehydration being the biggest and most urgent threat to any

burn victim, I motioned for the family to follow me into the treatment room where I put the cat on a heavy towel. With the mother and children on one side of the table whispering nervously to each other, I showed the father how to hold the cat for me, and started an intravenous drip to rehydrate her. While I was examining her, the cat kept making mournful sounds, which at first I took to be cries of pain. But as the sounds intensified, I noticed her focus on the box. Looking inside, I saw six beautiful, black-and-gray tiger-striped kittens with singed fur, but otherwise none the worse for wear. Their eyes still closed from birth, they were meowing for their mother and her milk.

About that time, a fifth family member came knocking on the back door. This high school–aged young man spoke English quite well, and soon I had the whole story. They were a migrant family who had been working the fields, thinning sugar beets, when they noticed that a nearby haystack was on fire. It seems the first cutting of hay had been put up wet, and subsequently the stack caught fire via spontaneous combustion. Clearly, the haystack was going to be lost, so the farm owner, his wife, and the migrant family focused on wetting down neighboring structures with hoses and buckets, so the fire wouldn't spread.

After a frantic and ultimately successful battle to contain the fire, they had stopped to catch their breath when they saw something coming out of the smoke around the haystack. It was a cat with a kitten in its mouth. Following the cat to a small calving shed, they found five other kittens in a sleepy heap. Despite the innate fear of fire all animals share, this determined mother had gone back to her kittens' birthplace, plunging headfirst into the

burning stack six times to rescue her kittens. One by one, she had grabbed each of the kittens by the scruff of the neck, taken it to safety, and gone back for the next. The kittens' eyes were still closed, so they weren't damaged, and their feet never touched the burning embers on the ground, so their tiny foot pads were still soft and pink. But Momma cat had paid a tremendous physical price for saving all of her babies.

With the mother cat stabilized, the son made introductions, and I started the medical record, which included names, address, and how they were going to pay, along with information about the pet. The son explained that the injured cat was one of the barn cats on the farm where the family was working. The farmer had made it clear that he didn't want to spend a lot of money on the cat, except in this case, to put her out of her misery. He had given his permission for the family to take the cat and kittens to the vet for medical attention—but it would have to be on their dime.

I had seen this family's old car when I first went to the door. I saw the clothes they wore. Coming from a farm background myself, I knew the plight of migrant families firsthand. I also knew I'd be giving them a discount, a fire sale of sorts, but they didn't. Considering that they didn't have much money, I wondered, why would this family drop everything to take responsibility for a severely injured cat and kittens that they didn't even own.

When I asked the boy, he turned to his parents with the question, and suddenly the room got very quiet. After a moment the man pointed to the woman, who undid the top couple of buttons of her shirt to reveal a badly burned chest. The scars were so

severe I winced. The boy explained that his mother, as a young girl, had reached up and grabbed the handle of a pot on the stove, pouring boiling water all down her chest and legs. Through her son, the woman told me she knew how painful burns were and how disfiguring, but she also remembered how her mother had loved her and nursed her back to health. She also took comfort in knowing that her own husband and children adored her as she was. She, and the whole family, were going to do no less for the cat and her kittens.

Moved by their compassion, I went back to filling in the information on the necessary paperwork. When I asked the family if they had a name for the cat, even a temporary one we could put on the chart, they buzzed for a few moments, then looked at me, all smiling broadly. The boy said, “We’re going to call her Caliente!”

Mrs. Lagrone, my high school Spanish teacher, would have killed me if I hadn’t remembered that that word means “hot.” A perfect name for a heroic cat who, with some major medical treatment and lots of TLC, would be restored to health and cherished always by a very special family.



# Heaven-Sent

*By Dolores Kozielski*

Father Joe was late. A monk of the Franciscan order, the father was my good friend—and our visiting priest. During the summer months he came often to help say some of the masses. I was waiting anxiously for him to arrive at the parish rectory when suddenly the phone rang. It was Father Joe.

“Where are you?” I asked.

“In the church parking lot,” he answered. “I need your help.”

Rushing outside, I waved to Father Joe, who was opening his car trunk. By the time I reached him, he had his suitcase unzipped. Packed neatly inside were his brown monk’s robes. He reached for them.

“What are you doing with those?” I asked.

“I need my cincture,” he said. “That’s the braided white cord that gets tied around the waist of my robe.”

Hearing a rustling noise, I looked up into a nearby tree. There I noticed a frightened half-grown kitten clinging tightly to a drooping branch. Skittish about coming back down to earth, the kitten, whom I immediately pegged as a stray, meowed relentlessly.

“What are you going to do?” I asked.

"I'm going to rescue this tabby—and you're going to help me," he said. "I have an inspiration and know just how we can do it."

Father Joe called up to the kitten, "You'll be down soon, little kitty." Then handing me the cord, he commanded, "Hurry, Dolores, tie this end of the cincture to my car bumper."

I did as I was told, wondering what in heaven's name my friend was up to.

Next, Father Joe hopped up onto the trunk of his car. Reaching his arm up as far as he could, he managed to grab the tip of the tree limb. Pulling it down, he tethered the other end of the cincture tightly to the branch.

"I'm going to move the car forward very slowly. When the branch gets lower, grab the kitten," he said.

"Aha!" I said, "Now I get it!"

Father Joe gently pressed down on the gas pedal. The car inched forward ever so slightly. With clinging claws, the kitten gripped tightly to the cinctured branch. As the branch got lower and lower, the scared tabby meowed and meowed. Finally, the little cat was almost in my grasp.

"Just a wee bit more and you'll be able to reach him," said Father Joe.

The car had only moved forward a smidge when suddenly, the taut, braided cord snapped. The tabby was catapulted from the branch, whizzing up and out into the distant sky. Father Joe shot from his car. Together we watched the poor kitten sailing off toward the edge of the church grounds and the neighboring homes beyond.

"Oh, no!" we cried in unison.

Without hesitating, we darted in the direction of the spot where we thought the kitten might have landed. For what seemed an eternity, we searched the bushes, calling for the missing cat. “Here, kitty-kitty. Here, kitty.”

Father Joe kept stopping to listen. “Shhh,” he’d say. “Do you hear anything?”

But we didn’t hear one blessed meow. Eventually we surrendered our search. We both felt bad, but there was nothing we could do except say a prayer for the fallen feline. Father Joe and I had tried our best to save the kitten; now the matter was in God’s hands. Brooding, we walked back to the car in silence.

“What a homecoming,” I said, as I helped Father bring his belongings into the rectory. “But I bet the kitten will be okay. They have a knack for landing on their feet.”

The next day, I went to the supermarket to purchase my weekly groceries. As I passed from the meat section to the frozen foods, I heard my name being called. “Dolores!”

It was Mrs. Kenney, one of the parishioners. As she approached, I noticed a huge bag of cat food and litter stacked in her shopping cart. This surprised me as I knew from past conversations that she had a disdain for cats. I remembered her story of the stray calico who had ruined her beautiful flower garden.

“Dolores, you’ll never guess what happened.” Mrs. Kenney could hardly contain herself. “Emily, my six-year-old, has been begging me to get a cat for months, so I finally told her, ‘If God wants you to have a cat, you’ll have one.’ Since then, she’s been praying every night, asking God to send her a kitten. Yesterday, we both stepped outside to pick up the toys that were strewn all

over the backyard. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a tiny tabby flew out of the sky, landing squarely into Emily's arms. Emily shouted, 'Mommy, look! God's answered my prayers!' It was a miracle. I've never witnessed anything like it in my entire life."

My eyes opened wide. "That's amazing," I said, feeling my cheeks flush a little as I recalled the real story of the cat's origins. At the same time I was relieved, knowing that the kitten was safe and in good hands—Emily's and the reformed Mrs. Kenney's.

When I got home, I called Father Joe immediately and told him about Emily's prayers for a kitten and the tabby plummeting out of the blue into her arms.

We both laughed.

"God works in mysterious ways," said Father Joe.

"This time you're absolutely right," I said. "There's no doubt this kitten was heaven-sent!"

## Must-Know Info

### Recognizing, Treating, and Preventing Pain in Cats

*“Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional,” says Christine Longaker of the human hospice movement. Animals feel pain just as humans do, and just as with humans, there are ways to ease the pain and keep the joy and mobility present.*



It’s particularly challenging for veterinarians and cat owners to recognize when a cat is in pain. Cats can’t “talk” to us about their pain, and they are descended from predators. Predators who can’t hunt become the hunted and end up as a stronger animal’s dinner. Even in today’s household, where the biggest threat the cat faces is not frequent enough openings of the treat drawer, cats often will hide pain or sickness from those around them. From an evolutionary perspective, it is not in a cat’s best interest to demonstrate weakness.

Pain is a highly individualized experience. The big Maine coon cat may have a high threshold for discomfort, while the delicate Siamese can barely tolerate a broken nail. In cats, as among humans, pain is a highly individual experience. Subtle changes in a cat’s interactions with the family may be a clue that pain is present. Be on the lookout for unexpected hiding, irritability, lack of appetite, or just plain weird(er) behavior.

Most pain falls into one of two categories—acute or chronic—and these need to be treated quite differently. Acute pain is most often encountered following surgery, trauma, or injury. If a procedure will hurt a human, it will hurt a cat to about the same degree. Pain is best prevented by delivering pain medication before the painful procedure is performed. Surgical pain prevention and management strategies can be tailored to match the anticipated discomfort. Chronic pain most commonly arises from degenerative joint disease (osteoarthritis), and it presents its own challenges, which can include loss of appetite and depression.

Never give your cat medicine out of your own medicine chest. Unfortunately, many of the lifesaving medications a person takes can be fatal for a cat. It is *never* appropriate to reach into your own pill vial to try to “fix a feline,” even when you think he may be in pain. Instead, call your veterinarian or the nearest veterinary emergency clinic for the best advice.

Sometimes the best pain management doesn't even require medication. Nonprescription methods of managing pain are emerging as useful tools in the feline pain management tool kit. Acupuncture is well accepted by cats, as is physiotherapy—including exercise in an underwater treadmill! Nondrug options may be used with or without helpful pain management medications. Your veterinarian will tailor the program to meet your cat's needs.

Nutrition makes the world go 'round. High-quality food and nutritional supplements that are appropriate for your cat's stage of life can mean the difference between just living and thriving. Overweight cats are at greater risk for the pain of osteoarthritis, so optimum nutrition can be used to achieve ideal body condi-

tion, minimizing discomfort and maximizing mobility. Fit beats fat hands down!

Help aging arthritic cats with their vertical moves by managing your cat's "ecosystem." Cats enjoy jumping onto the window ledge to watch the birds outside, so help them do so with less effort. Carpeted kitty steps may be just the ticket to more comfortable ups and downs.

Raise food and water dishes to between elbows and shoulders. Cats with back pain appreciate not having to "bend over" to eat and drink. Food and water dishes at elbow height take a tremendous strain off the lower back, making a simple activity like dinner far more enjoyable.

Slippery surfaces can create a treacherous path through the house. Cats with osteoarthritis may be slightly unsteady on their feet, leading to spills on slick floors. Cover tile, hardwood, or vinyl floors with nonskid area rugs to prevent potentially disastrous falls. Prevent access to stairs if that becomes appropriate.

Finally, stick with the "pain program." Once your cat is engaged in a program to reduce pain, maximize mobility, and maintain comfort, do not make any changes without the input of your veterinarian. Because effective pain management plans are most successful when they involve a "multimodal" approach, all parts of the treatment plan work in synergy to create the best effect. Even a small change can throw the plan out of balance.

## MUST-KNOW INFO

### Lost? . . . and Found Quickly!

*One of the biggest mistakes people make when pets go missing is underestimating the seriousness of the situation. When a pet gets out, the response should never be “wait and see.” Your pet is about as capable of surviving on his own as a toddler is.*



First on the to-do list: a “lost cat” sign.

Take a picture of your cat every year and include the most recent photograph on your sign.

You don’t need to describe your cat from nose to tail. If you’ve lost a large, black cat, start with that: “Lost! Large, black cat!”

Also put the word “reward” in big, clear letters. Money can be a powerful motivation for someone who doesn’t care otherwise, and it can be an incentive for someone to tell you who has your pet if it was stolen.

Leave out a piece of information that only the true finder would know, such as a distinguishing mark or the color of your cat’s collar. Asking the finder to describe your pet will thwart scam artists who prey on people with lost pets, claiming to have the pet in order to collect a reward.

Make sure the sign can be easily read from the distance of a

passerby walking or a car driving on the road. Include your phone number and area code—a cell phone number would be best (keep that phone with you and turned on).

A measure of “sappiness” should be your final touch: get people emotionally involved. Put “child is heartbroken” or “my best friend is missing.” It really can help!

Print at least fifty signs on bright-colored paper and post them all around the area where your pet was lost. Post half of the signs so that they’re facing the street where drivers can see them, and half facing the sidewalk, so pedestrians can read them. Poke a hole and thread a rubber band through the top of the flyer and hang copies from your neighbors’ doorknobs. Post in nearby places where the finder might go, such as veterinary offices, cat parks, pet supply stores, groomers, grocery stores, and the post office.

If your cat has been microchipped, contact the registry and let them know your cat is missing.

Tell your mail carrier that your pet is missing, too!

Next on your action list are these important tasks:

*Place ads.* Place a “lost cat” ad in local newspapers, and post it on Internet sites. Check the “found cat” ads in the same places.

*Visit shelters.* Visit every shelter within at least a fifty-mile radius of where your pet was lost. Since new pets are brought in daily, it’s highly recommended that you go to the shelters every day. Shelter workers are busy, and they might not remember seeing your pet or recognize him from your verbal description, so visiting is better than calling. Ask to see the pets in the infirmary, as well as in the general runs, because your pet might have been injured.




While you're at the shelters, ask to check the listings of animals who didn't make it, such as those hit by cars. Hard as it is to know a pet was killed, it's harder to never know what happened.

*Change your phone message.* Record a message on all your phones (home, office, cell) that encourages people to leave a message. Suggestion: "If you're calling about my missing pet, I'm out looking for him right now. Please leave a message, and I'll call you as soon as I come in."

*Enlist help.* Ask friends, family, and neighbors to help you search by going door-to-door in your area. Ask neighbors to check their garages, toolsheds, and crawl spaces. Cats often slip into such spaces unnoticed and are trapped when doors are shut behind them.

Just as you shouldn't delay in trying to find your pet, you shouldn't give up too easily. People may tell you you're nuts to keep looking, but pets do turn up after weeks and even months of searching. Make sure your signs stay posted and keep visiting the shelters.

 **Liz Blackman**, inspired by her own two rescued cats, Lita and Winchell, founded 1-800-HELP-4-PETS, an identification system that works like a nationwide 911 service for pets in any emergency—lost, home fire, car accident, natural disaster, and travel emergencies. Since 1996, 1-800-HELP-4-PETS has helped thousands of pets get help and get home. For more information, listings for lost and found pets, and advice on how to prevent loss or find a missing pet, visit these websites: [www.help4pets.com](http://www.help4pets.com) and [www.thecenterforlostpets.com](http://www.thecenterforlostpets.com).

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