



Cat Tales

by Nicola Burnell

They say that timing is everything. When shit happens, you have to step back, take a deep breath and look for the glimmer of light in the darkness. I'm usually pretty good doing at that. At least I thought I was, until the night my cat Soukie failed to come home.

I'd seen the various LOST CAT signs tacked to poles around my neighborhood. How sad, I'd thought, smug in the knowledge that my cat was different. She would never get lost. She was crazy, wild and vicious.

She wasn't your typical *Feed me, Pet me, Love me* cat. She was your hide-behind-the-chair-to-ambush-the-dog-or-unsuspecting-house-guest-or-anyone-stupid-enough-to-piss-her-off cat.

Her looks were deceiving – who wouldn't want to pet her? She was absolutely gorgeous!



So why all the hissing and scratching at humans?

I have no idea, except to suggest that she really was a wild cat who condescended to make me and my two sons her pets. She had us so well trained that when she whined to go out, we dutifully opened the door, despite the knowledge that a pack of healthy coyotes shared the woods near our house.

Soukie was a kitten when my son picked her out of a litter of short-haired black and white cats. He was drawn to how different she looked from the others; huge head, stubby legs with fluffy pantaloons, a starburst of color over her eyes and extra white toes on her front paws.

Being a polydactyl gave her an advantage outdoors. And boy did she love her back yard! After trying to keep her indoors for the first four years of her life, I finally gave in to her cries for freedom. I'm sure they were heard on Nantucket.



Soukie's Garden

Soukie settled down after becoming an indoor/outdoor cat, although she still attacked strangers. She became a great hunter and picked off the baby rabbits under my shed every spring. I thought it

weird, however, that she never tried to harm our pet rabbit. In fact, they would hang out on the couch and watch TV together.



Even Soukie had her cute moments

Did I mention that Soukie once forced a vet to wear shoulder-length Kevlar gloves so he could give her a rabies shot? He then politely requested that I find another vet. So I did. But even the fearless Joan Goffi had her challenges when it came to examining Soukie.

I'm sure you're wondering why anyone would put up with a mean, grumpy, potentially dangerous cat when there are so many gentle kitties looking for a home. I thought the same thing too.



Perhaps that's why I decided to let her go outdoors. I felt a short happy life of exploring, hunting and sleeping under her favorite chair on the deck was preferable to a long, miserable life of endless yearnings to be free.

The night Soukie disappeared, my son slept on the couch with the back door open, hoping to hear that unmistakable thud of her paws landing on the deck. I slept like a baby, confident that she could, if necessary, face down a coyote.

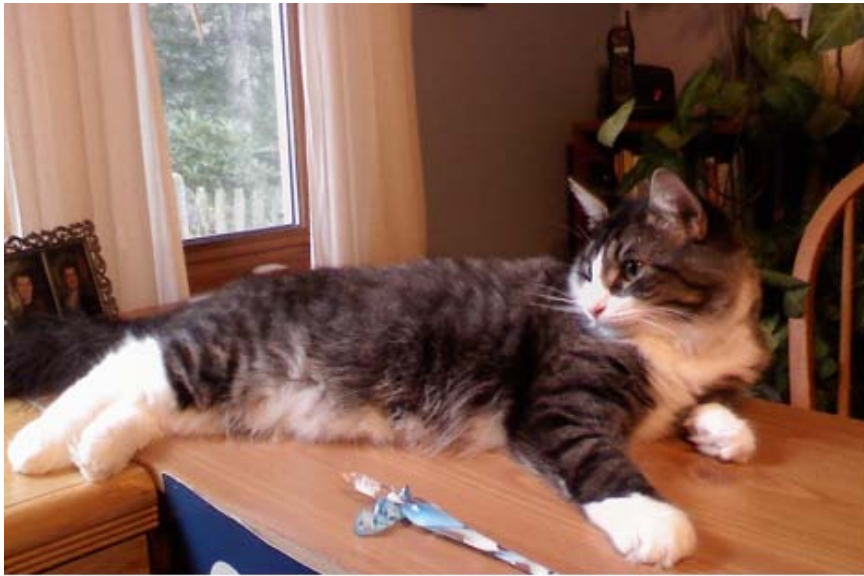
When the rapturous howls of a coyote kill tore into my dreams I literally flew out of bed and ran into the street, flash light in hand, screaming for my cat. My sons were right behind me. It wasn't long before we all felt unnerved by the eerie silence, punctuated only by an occasional crack of twigs or hooting owls.

"She'll be fine," I reassured my sons. "She'll be home in the morning."

The grief hit me immediately. I couldn't understand why losing such an unfriendly cat would feel so hard to live with. It was my turn to tack up LOST CAT signs. I uploaded postings on Craigslist and put a notice in the newspaper. No response.

A week before I drove my son to Boston, to begin his first year at College, I adopted a nine-month-old cat from the MSPCA. I wasn't sure I was ready for another cat, but my younger son was instantly chosen by Travis, the feistiest, softest feline in the room.

Unlike Soukie, Travis IS a *Feed me, Pet me, Love me* cat. Having been a stray since birth he has no interest in going outdoors – he's been there, done that.



Travis relaxing in his new INDOOR home.

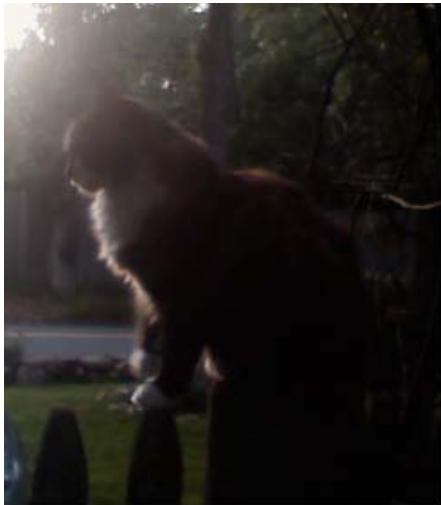
Travis is content to snuggle up as close to us humans as he can get. He even plays with the cat toys that have been ignored by every other cat I've ever had. He has a way of looking at us that says *Thank you. I really, really appreciate you adopting me.*

When I left my son in Boston I kept waiting for the tears and the suffocating grief that other mothers had warned me to expect. But I was all cried out.

Losing Soukie had been perfect timing. In an almost poetic synchronicity it had prepared me to also let go of my son. I'd already felt the loss, the longing, the emptiness. What was left was a sense of excitement for my son in his new world, and confirmation that it was time for me to let him go.

As I pull into my driveway I don't look for Soukie anymore. I anticipate the delighted meows of Travis, happy to have his family home, eager to let us know how much he loves us. And I don't go into my son's bedroom, still cluttered with the chaos of his moving out.

I go out into my garden and I watch the sunset. And I wonder if Soukie is watching it too, her spirit resting on the broken wooden gate beneath the arbor of wisteria and clematis.



Nicola Burnell is the Publisher and a contributing writer for this magazine. She teaches novel writing and creativity development classes, Reiki and Personal Empowerment workshops. She is also a member in Letters of the National League of American Pen Women.

Nicola is offering her own writing retreats at [Casa della Quercia](#), an historic villa in Northern Tuscany, beginning May 2012.

Nicola lives in Harwich with her two sons and

several pets. Visit her [blog](#) or [Email](#) her.

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