

Cats – Drug-Free Attitude Adjusters

I would not be able to get through the day without my cats. They are the best company and attitude adjusters I can imagine. I love their independent spirits, their individual personalities and their incredible curiosity. They luxuriate briefly when I lavish attention on them, but let me know when they are satisfied and ready to move on. I am well trained as to when to distribute treats and when to turn on the bathroom faucet to just the right trickle for a fresh drink.

Indy's favorite place in the whole world is his box on my desk. He loves to snooze there while I'm working. When I look up from my keyboard and see him all curled up, his state of total relaxation brings a smile to my face. Sometimes when I am thinking, I reach over and stroke his soft ear or scratch his head. If I want to tease him, I click on the cat office assistant in Word and turn up the sound. He cannot figure out why that cat is inside the speaker or how to get him out of there!

Recently, I moved my computer office to a different area of the house. I switched from the big desk I was using to a much smaller computer desk. Because of lack of desktop space, I really didn't want to put Indy's box on it. He sat on a ledge near me and stared at me with unblinking intensity for hours. I couldn't stand it; I went back for his box, but couldn't get it pried off the old desk. Yikes! I made a new box, almost exactly the same as the old box and put it in the appropriate place on my desk.

Unacceptable! That was not his box so the staring continued. I had to use a putty knife and carefully but firmly pry to release the old box from the double-sided tape with which I'd attached it, without destroying it. Finally it came loose! Thank Goodness! I put it on my new desk and Indy curled up in it with a self-satisfied smirk and didn't get out of it for three days.

Spooky is the oldest of the three. He knows how beautiful he is and loves to sit and pose elegantly. He usually prefers to watch the rowdiness of the others, from a high point, but occasionally he still joins in and thumps them soundly. He's careful to get his full 22 hours of beauty sleep per day, usually on a bed. Interestingly, he only sleeps on beds that are neatly made. Once the covers get pulled back, he leaves. Humph! Then he will only sleep on a pillow.

His purr is amazing, loud and raspy sounding, but filled with complete contentment and joy. Sometimes he just has to come and tell me how happy he is. His purr is so loud he sounds like a lawnmower in the middle of the night. When he parks himself next to my head and turns on the joy, it resonates through and around me and fills me with peace.

The youngster, Lucky, was named by my son who rescued him from a highway. While driving along, Alex saw something fly out from under the truck in front of him. At the last moment, he realized it was not trash but a kitten. Having been taught by me, the former insurance person, never to avoid an animal at the risk of injuring self – he did the only possible thing. He drove his pickup up onto the bank and leaped out to recover the miraculously unharmed kitten.

As a kitten, Lucky seemed to think that if a Ford F150 could not hurt him, nothing could. He marched

right into this big house, as if he was born here, and started creating havoc. Spooky has always been sweet and accepting of kittens but Indy tried to make it clear that he was not. He hissed his displeasure and lack of desire to play but it did not intimidate Lucky at all. Indy soon decided that it was too much trouble to hiss while under attack. He gave up and joined wholeheartedly in the wrestle-mania.

My younger son hated his first year away at college because he had no cat. His roommates annoyed him and he had no purring to adjust his attitude. He frequently called and demanded that I rub Spooky's belly and put him on the phone. Before that year ended he found himself an off campus apartment that allows cats. Although he wanted to take Spooky, we agreed that Spooky is old, settled, and might not appreciate adapting to a new home. He acquired a kitten over that summer and since his temporary digs did not allow pets, Kirby kitten came here.

Lucky was ecstatic! Barely past kitten stage himself, nothing could have been better than a lively little friend to play with. Kirby is the blackest black cat I have ever seen and, although he is incredibly shiny, he is very hard to see. Even in daylight, he tends to slip around the edges of visibility and he is so stealthy he seems to just appear and disappear. Evan swears he has ninja in his blood and I have to agree.

After a wild summer of tearing around the house, they settled down over the winter. When Evan brought him home for the first weekend visit, he came out of his carrier at a full pounce and chased Lucky up the stairs. For a full 24 hours they played, nonstop. Then I found them sound asleep in the hall as if they both collapsed, mid step. By the first of the year, they had matured enough to rest a bit throughout the visits.

However, everything changed again because Evan's girlfriend rescued a tiny kitten, found motherless on her campus. Naturally, the summer apartment does not allow pets so guess who all are spending the summer here. Baby Freya is the first female around here for many years. She may be the smallest of the bunch but she thinks she is really big and bad. She jumps on all of the big boys and will not cry for mercy, no matter how rough they get. She also thinks she is the princess and does not hesitate to push the boys off their favorite sleeping place or out of the food dish.

I approach my bed with caution because she lurks under it. Walking too close draws her out and she wraps around a foot and bites. She is adamant about the importance of personal hygiene and none of us maintains her standards. She has to clean every face within reach of her tongue. It is quite an experience to wake in the middle of the night with her raspy tongue licking my ear ...or my eyelid!

They are very entertaining though. For very little effort, scooping the litter boxes daily, keeping food in the food bowls and water in all the water dishes, they provide a tremendous amount of fun and laughter. Everything that moves when touched is a toy. Paper balls are wonderful prey and grocery bags are vicious beasts to be subdued. Watching them stalk each other and plot sneaky attacks is always funny. Sprinkling some catnip into an empty paper bag is good for many laughs. When Indy crawls up under the bedspread and plays "monster under the cover", I always laugh until I cry.

No matter what upsets me, the presence of the cats adjusts my attitude. There is no way I can stay cranky when a purring cat curls up on my lap or beside me. When I see Indy stretched out on his back, sleeping with his feet sticking up in all directions, or Lucky relaxed on top of the dresser with all his feet hanging over the edge, I cannot help but feel everything is all right and start to relax myself. I cannot continue to worry about anything when Freya attacks the kitty cube, jumping in and out and on top and rolling it all over the floor.

I am very grateful the cats remind me not to take myself, or life, too seriously. Cats are capable of being very dignified. They will pose beautifully. They will stroll around with their tails up and a snotty look of disdain. They will totally ignore me and pointedly ignore a new toy. Then suddenly attack a vicious piece of lint on the floor or the plastic ring from a milk container.

There are times when I am the only person in the house but I am never alone or lonely. With one to five cats in the room, how could I be? Yesterday, I sat here typing with three of them sleeping within arms reach and the other two just behind me on the bed. The problem with that is the amounts of relaxed sleeping energy they send out makes me want to curl up and take a nap too. They are all around me again. Sometimes it is just too...hard...to....stay....awak.....zzzzz...

Patricia Kenworthy ©June 2007