



FELINE FRIENDS

A BRIEF CAT ENCOUNTER

Susie Willis



One evening a small black cat strolled up to our back door and asked to be allowed in. She was a friendly little thing. We hadn't seen her in the neighbourhood before, so we were concerned she might be lost. There was a tiny silver canister attached to her collar, which contained a rolled up scroll with her name, Snowball, and a mobile number.

As it was late we texted the mobile with the message, 'Snowball is visiting us in Balmain and we're worried she might be lost'. The owner replied immediately that she had just moved to the area, and in fact lived a couple of doors from us in our rear laneway, so we wandered out and met Snowball's pyjama-wearing owner. It turned out she had three cats, tiny black Snowball and two larger grey cats, one named Sampson. The three were littermates.

The next evening Snowball came back with her friends. We thought it best not to encourage them, so didn't allow them inside. When we went to bed we could hear them rustling outside our bedroom window — they were very persistent, so eventually we opened the window and they came in and plonked themselves on the bed.

Over the next few weeks we became very well acquainted with all three cats. There began a ritual of us leaving the

window slightly open each evening and sleeping every night with one to three cats on our bed. It was a delightful experience. They were the friendliest and most beautifully mannered cats.

Around that time my husband and I got the flu, so for maybe a week there was always someone in bed during the day. The cats took full advantage of this situation and stayed all day as well as the nights. It must have been heaven for a cat: a huge, comfy bed with someone prepared to cuddle and stroke them 24 hours a day.

We were very sad when we learned the owner was planning to move to Tasmania. They'd only been residents for maybe a month. My husband and I discussed whether we might ask the owner if we could keep Sampson (of whom we'd become particularly fond) in exchange for an extremely generous amount of money. We also talked about the idea of locking Sampson in our house until the owner had moved! After all, she had three cats; surely she wouldn't miss one ... Sadly (and rightly) all three cats left for Tasmania. We still miss them.

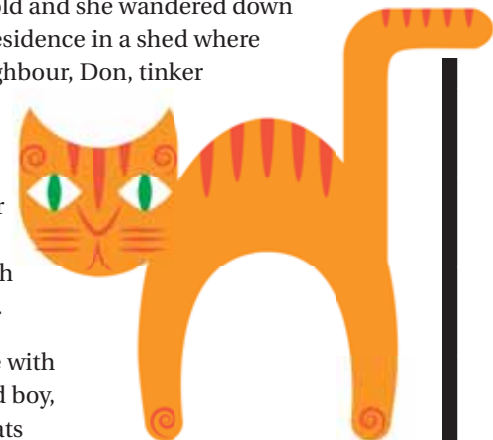
MIA'S STORY

Helen and David Carroll

In May 2008 a burly delivery man discovered Mia wandering along Sussex Street in Sydney's CBD. She had a small tag around her neck which read: 'Great cat. Bad owner.' He knew he couldn't leave this small, thin creature on the streets, but he had a sick elderly cat at home himself so he did the next best thing — he phoned his mum and told her to expect a special delivery. That's how Mia found her way to Maria, one of the kindest women you are ever likely to meet.

Despite being fed and pampered, after a few days Mia's restless spirit took hold and she wandered down the road to take up residence in a shed where she watched our neighbour, Don, tinker on his old car for a couple of days. Don and his wife Christine then brought her around the corner to us and she's been with our family ever since.

Mia shares her house with Will, a seven-year-old boy, three fellow rescue cats



— Fergus, Ella and Lily — and a 30-kilogram Rottweiler-cross rescue dog, Max, who is very wary of the feisty 3-kilogram ginger bundle with a growl like a lioness.

It was obvious when she joined our family that she had never experienced the usual creature comforts of home and she certainly wasn't used to being picked up for a cuddle. It has taken almost three years but now Mia likes nothing better than to curl up on our laps in the evening, even if she is quick to administer a little bite if the 'person cushion' dares to move.

She is an excellent hunter but so gentle with her prey that assorted skinks, snails, insects, cicadas and even magnificent butterflies can easily be released from her powder-puff mouth without a scratch or scar.

After being let out each morning Mia ascends to our roof where she watches the neighbourhood children assemble for the school bus. If ever she misses a day or two of 'rooftop supervision' due to inclement weather, we'll have a customary knock at the front door from a neighbour enquiring after her health. She traverses our small suburban block via rooftop and fence to peep into homes and spy on neighbours as they go about their lives — with open windows a particular temptation. She also loves to follow us around the garden, waiting to pounce from tiny hiding spots. Great cat. Proud owners.



Feline Friends, \$24.99, available from www.exislepublishing.com.au or from all good bookstores. All royalties generated from the sale of Feline Friends go to The Cat Protection Society of NSW.



HANA

Nita Harvey

In November 1985 we adopted from the CPS a lovely little tabby and white kitten named Hana (Japanese for 'flower') and her littermate, a tortie and white we called Kumquat. Inseparable friends with completely different personalities, Kumquat liked to be nursed and cuddled but Hana preferred to just sit very close and purr. They were wonderful cats and got on very well with our two dogs.



We visited our son in Queensland in August 2002 and Quat and Hana boarded at the vet, where they had run of the clinic. Immediately on our return we went to pick them up. I noted that Hana didn't look very happy and the vet nurse said she hadn't been too happy but they were both purring at the sound of our voices. When home we released them from their carriers and Hana jumped out and ran down the front steps.

When she reached the car where my husband was (still unpacking our gear) she collapsed. I went to her and she seemed lifeless. Panic stricken, we rushed back to the vet who pronounced her dead. The cause, he was sure, was a heart attack. Evidently she didn't feel well but only succumbed to her attack when she came back to the people and the home she loved. RIP Hana 1985–2002.

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