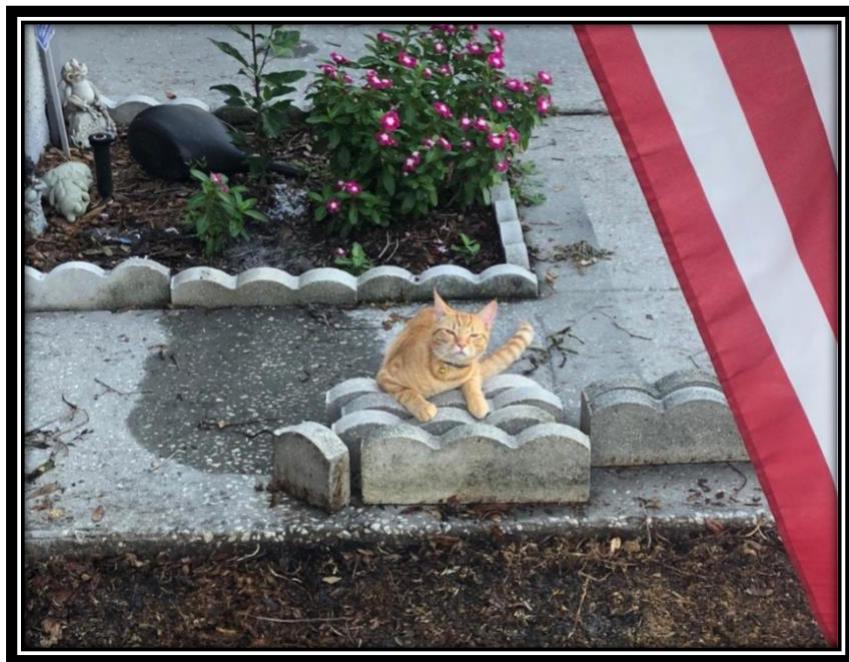


Puss Tiger Stripes:

A day of freedom worth living for
(and dying for)



A story, a great story, a very short true
great story, a life celebration of one very
“Wild Meow” who longed to be free and
free he was at last (as he passed)

..by Lubomir Ottl

Meow!!

Aren't cats amazing? They make the funniest videos, have bodies doing things most of us cannot imagine possible, and definitely come with self-centered personalities that make us wonder.

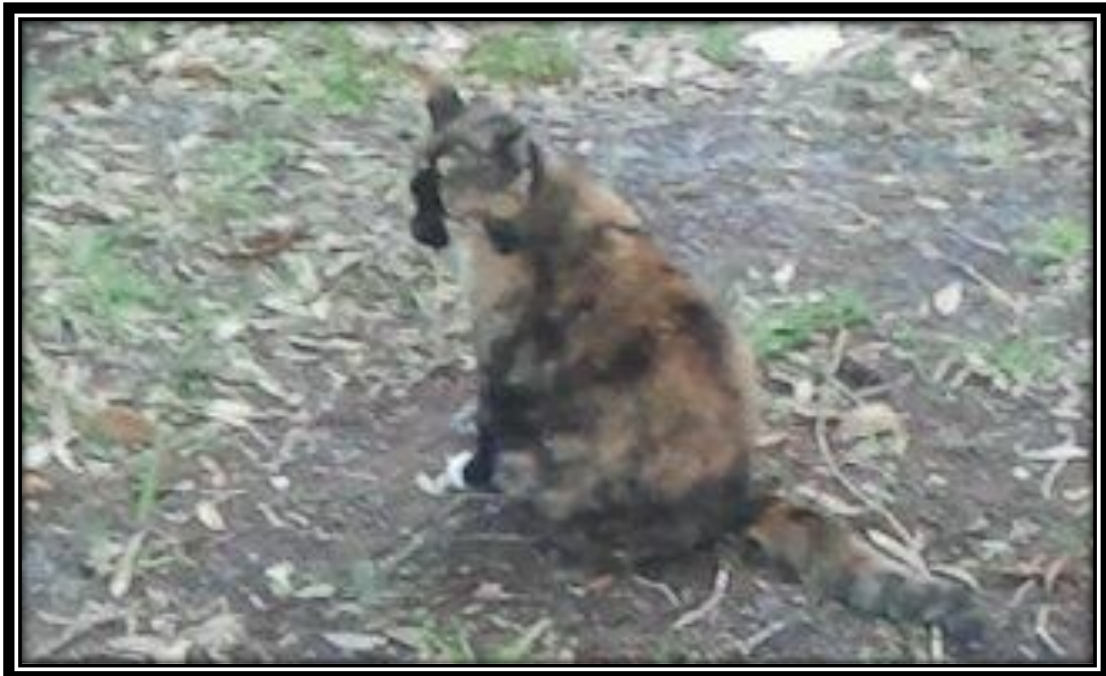


Cats can be very independent as well as completely needy. They know how to get their way. For example, when was the last time you saw a cat looking for a good deed? NEVERRRR!!! Cats do not do that. Still, we love them. When was the last time you saw a perfectly obedient cat, ready to serve you and protect you? NEVER!! Cats don't do that. Still, we love them. Or, when did you ever hear of a cat you can trust to leave alone or to have manners and good behavior when you are not around? NEVERRRRR!! You know cats do not do that.

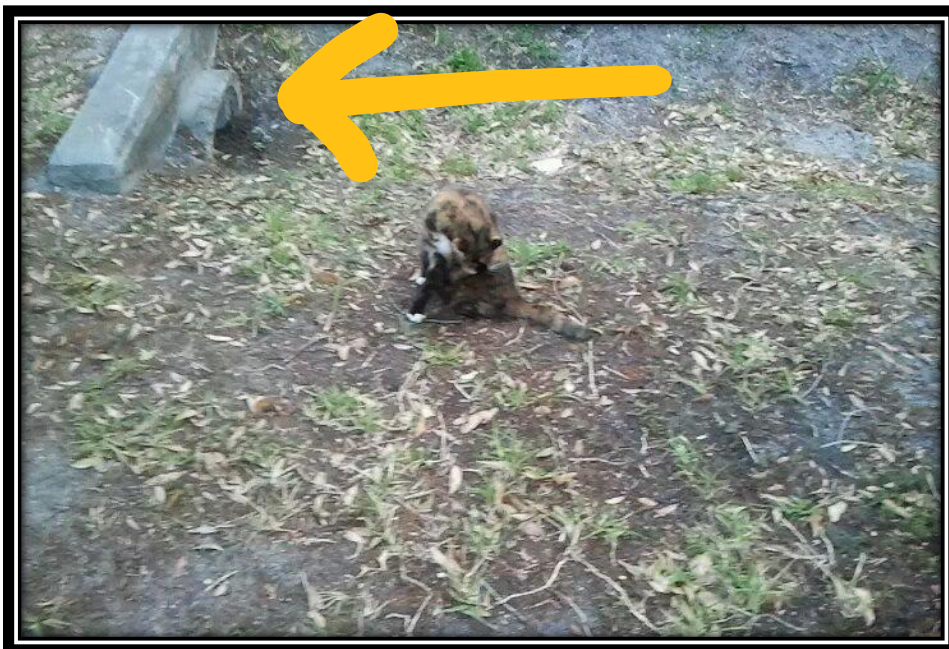


Everyone knows a cat will do what a cat wants to do, especially with no authority around. They will drink from your toilet, lick their....oh..sorry, clean themselves, then eat your food, then come by to rub their body over yours, twist their tail right into your face, and then take a nap in your bed. And after all this, still, we love cats.

It makes perfect sense to get a dog instead. Unlike cats, dogs will love you, truly love you. You can count on them to protect you, be a friend when you need one, lay down by your feet and not in your food plate, and try to keep you happy during good times and bad times. Dogs are loyal and help you. They will literally put your life before theirs. Dogs want to know what to do for you, a cat wants to know why it took you so long to get what the cat wants from you. Still, we love cats and despite all logical reasons against it, our family got a cat too.



Our first cat came with our first house. We bought a house and the cat was in it, or technically near by it. The cat was in the yard but clearly called our home her home. No one told us that the cat was there and as we got the keys and started to explore our very first love nest, this trash-like looking yet unusually friendly feline came out of nowhere and started to explore with us. I was afraid it was sick how friendly she was. She was a short, small kitty, soon officially “Kitty” with a rough winter fur of all colors (street, seasons, etc..aka pure street breed) that stayed on year-round in warm/hot Florida weather. This thing kept sneaking into the house anytime given a chance and always ended up in our master closet. After a few days of investigation, we found out that our Kitty was left behind by the previous homeowners, together with 2 newborn kittens in the sewer pipe outside the house.



So we went from no cats to three cats in three days. Hello, Kitties!!



Kitty was a great cat. Calm and friendly. Everyone loved kitty. Yep! Turns out many neighbors loved this friendly Kitty too and gave a food and love. She behaved more like a dog than a cat. If we went for a walk, Kitty followed. Kitty had a following too, a few neighbors and hundreds of fleas and so we let her stay in a garage.

The garage had some perks and a few challenges. First, every time the door moved up or down, it woke Kitty up. The cat thought it woke up, went straight to the bowl of food, realizing it is not hungry and that it was the garage door rather than the end of restful sleep, the confused cat went back to sleep again. This door up and down “move-wake up-eat-confusion-back to sleep” cycle kept repeating throughout the day. Kitty never figured it out.



Kitty did learn something about garage doors. She learned that moving garage door does not stop and if a cat sits below the door going down, the door wins. See, sometimes when the door woke Kitty up, she would go and sit at the very edge of the garage, right underneath the door. It was a safe place from other cats and animals, still a part of the house with great visibility of everything around, but not above. As the door started to move down, Kitty would stay. The door came lower, Kitty stayed. The door came so low that Kitty moved its head up towards it and looking right at it going down, Kitty stayed. The door was touching Kitty's body, Kitty hunkered down but stayed. The door came still lower,MEEEEEEEOOOOOOOOWWWWW!!!! Kitty moved. Kitty moved and eventually learned that the door wins. Now you know why people say cats have many lives.



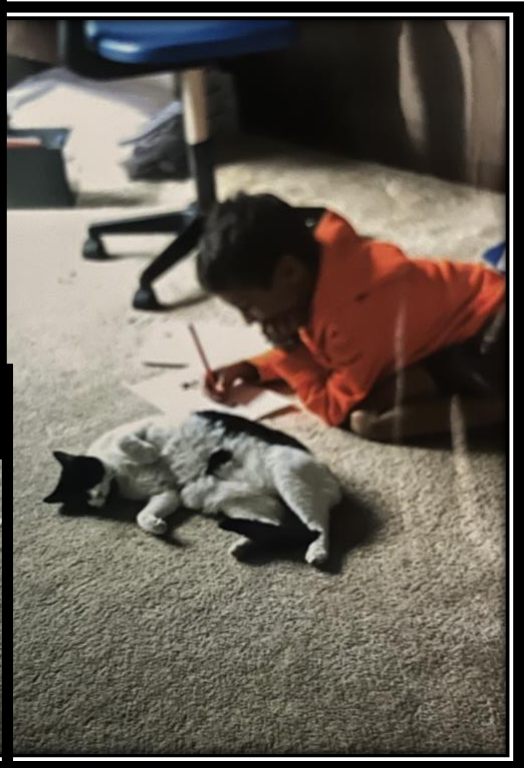
Still, Kitty occasionally broke into the house (hint cats love carpets and so do fleas) and we had our first, but not last, flea infestation. Eventually, we found a new house for Kitty's babies and Kitty stayed with the house as new owners moved in and we moved out five years later. We know we left Kitty in a better place and shape than how we found her. Years after we left, Kitty was still alive and well.



Our next cat was Emilio.



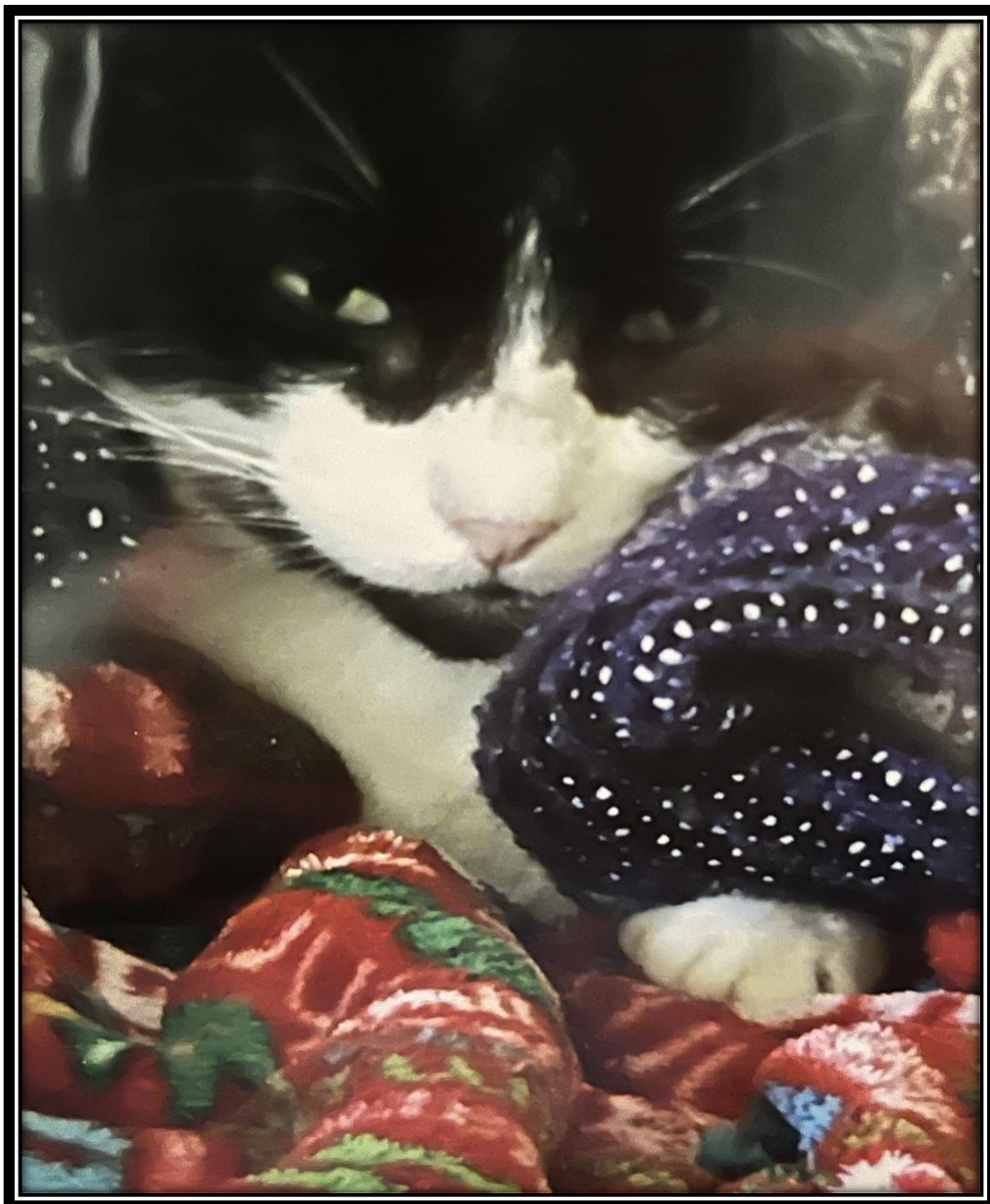
Emilio was a beautiful, fun, playful black and white male cat. We found him- a better explanation is that he found us. I was looking for a good deal on car repair and our family mechanic, Lui, was it. He sure was the cheapest just not the fastest. Still, a deal is a deal. I was willing to wait hours to save a few bucks on getting my wheels back on the road. And, this one time, as my car is getting ready, a tiny kitten meowed out of nowhere. Maybe a pound of a cat, coming somewhere from the sewer. Lui tried to scare it off with a garden house as most cats do not favor water, especially gushing from a garden house right at them, as if rain alone is not bad enough for a cat.



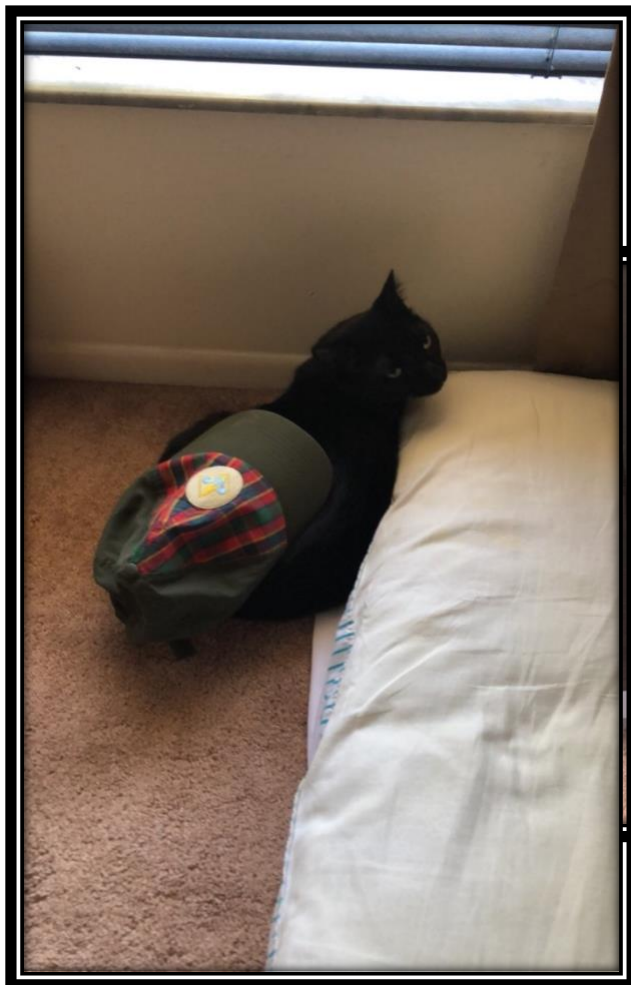
I must have made a friend that day defending the cat and stopping Lui from putting out the fire, ..sorry a cat. So this tiny feline fellow decided I will be his friend. I left the car at the shop and a few hours later I came back to pick it up. The car was ready and so was the cat. They were both waiting for me just as my chief mechanic, pool man, lawn man, and anything you may need to get done (Lui) was waiting to get paid. Nevertheless, I saved money on the car repair that day. The car was ready and so was the cat.



As I am sharing the story of a car and a tiny kitten with my wife before calling it a day, a little spark of compassion and, perhaps, a guilt, drove us to action of mercy. In minutes of our soul-search, I declared “Honey, I will drive back and if the cat finds me again, congratulations, you are a cat momma!” It was 11 pm and we became cat parents again. Emilio was a part of our family for 7 years.



So, what does all this have to do with Puss the Tiger Stripes? Hang on!! Patience my friend. Almost there. Kitty was our first cat that came with us to our first house. When we moved after 5 years, Kitty stayed. Emilio was our second-house cat who mysteriously disappeared after 7 years. Then we found Ajax. What a treasure! Ajax aka Jackson deserved a book of his own. A true feline masterpiece. It was so needy I had to pay \$200 to our kid's art teacher to give him away. It was well worth every penny. That cat was in a class of his own. He stayed only 2 months and that was all we could handle. Last time I heard he was well cared for and loved.



Our home had officially no cats. You may think a home without a cat is not a true home. (actually, it was awesome since I did most of the litter duties). So here we go again, wondering if our children would benefit from a new feline friend. Someone to care for and make memories with it. They are older and more responsible. If we do get another cat, it will be all them. Not to mention when we found a new home for Ajax and gladly gave away all and anything-cat related left around the house, there was nothing left other than a few photos with a cat. Getting a new cat would not only add more responsibility but also unnecessary expense. It really would not make any sense to get a new cat. The house was finally clean, with no litter, our guinea pig and 2 dwarf hamsters were finally safe. No way, we are not getting a cat. No way!!

NO WAY!!

In less than a month and two days before Christmas, my lovely bride found a cat. A kitten, orange (our middle son's favorite color), the last one from the litter with no home, about to go to a pound. Despite my firm position of "NO MORE CAT" in the house, we are Christmas shopping for all cat supplies with our children who believe we are getting gifts for someone else. It is Christmas Eve, and our children could not be any more excited about their new friend. Let's just say I kept my enthusiasm and excitement mostly on the inside. \$300 later we have a cat. Merry Christmas!



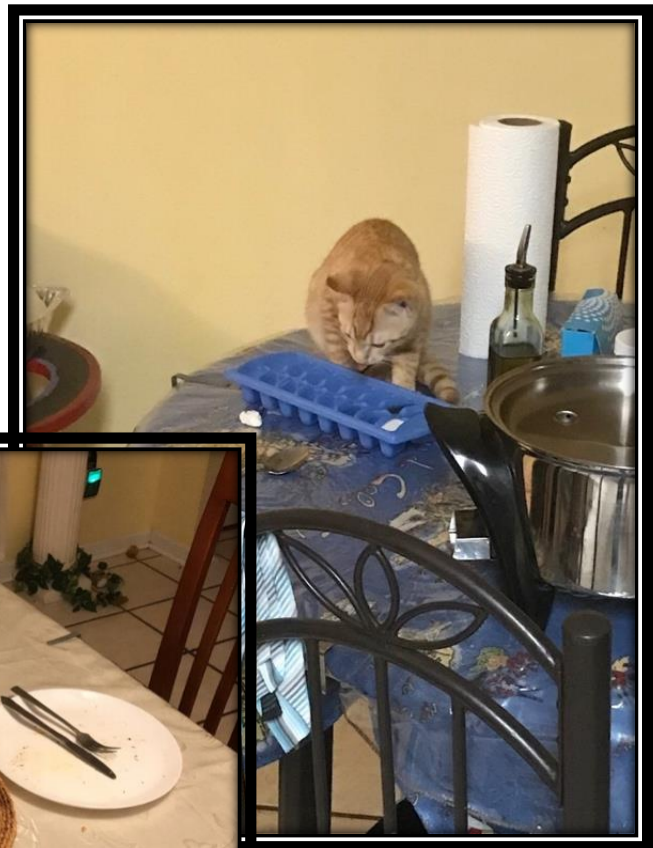
I must say the kitten was cute. Scared but happy to have a new home. He was an orange, light-brown striped male, perfectly healthy, about the size of our guinea pig. All that was left was to pick a name. Given he looked like Puss in Boots from the Shrek series, a tiger, and had stripes, ..and because we could not agree on a single-word name, we named him Puss Tiger Stripes.

He was not allowed outside. We decided that for him. He can be a cat, our cat, but an indoor cat. He will love it. Steady weather, no fleas, an oasis of peace. The cat will chill and the boys will calm down with the cat. I may even get some work done as the house is quieter. This will work.



Our little friendly feline fellow warmed up rather quickly with us. Only a few days later he discovered our furniture, clothes, shoes, guinea pig, kitchen with bread, tabletop, and his litter. He also learned how to bite, scratch, and be free.

Cat did not chill and neither did the boys calm down. About 3-4 weeks after Puss the Tiger stripes contributed to our family, this orange cat was like a fire: knocking everything down in its way, litter all over the place, food, and water spilled everywhere, the leather sofa trashed, bags with bread chewed up, guinea pig in panic. Puss was no Garfield. This thing was a rebel, a wild one.





Eventually, Tiger discovered we have a patio. I am not sure what a cat sees or how it perceives things around it but this cat was excited. He would be climbing our screen patio like a Spiderman, up and down, sideways, everywhere. Everything got his attention. If it moved, he would charge at it. If it did not move, he would scratch it. If he could not scratch it, he would bite it. I was it, everyone was it, everything was it, no escape, no mercy. From here he would see butterflies, birds, lizards, and...squirrels. If there was a cat heaven, this must have been it. All the food, water, shelter, people to care for a cat, people to play with a cat, people to clean up after the cat. Not bad from going to a pound before Christmas straight to a cat's paradise. Only if there was a way to get to the yard. The screen was still in the way.

Stripes was a great climber but a miserable handyman. He learned quickly to pierce a hole in the screen, make it bigger, and behold, a door, or should I say a gate to feline heaven? Before we could fix all the holes in the screen and clean up all the mess, Puss the Tiger Striped officially became an outdoor cat. He was 4 months old. Fortunately, just old enough for a Rabies shot, and, well, whatever it is called that makes you not have babies and also calms a young male cat down. Puss surely paid a price for his new freedom with his manhood. For some reason, he did not calm down either. Well, at least now he was treated against flees, Rabies, and (cat) babies..he was ready for the outdoors with minimum impact on us.



Tiger got used to our neighborhood rather quickly although our neighbors struggled a bit. He would go into people's homes, chase their birds away, and use bathrooms in flowerbeds nearby. Fortunately, he would tire quickly in the hot Florida sun. It takes more effort to be active outdoors in the heat as opposed to destroying everything at the house in the comfort of air-conditioning.





Maybe not all the days were as free as the cat would hope for. As Puss got used to our house, and neighborhood, our boys got used to Puss. They would start to teach him all kinds of tricks like holding him against his will, dressing him up, carrying him around, chasing him, etc. You

could tell Puss would simply give up and give in. He would give out this sad look followed by a long “meeeeeeooooowww”, meaning “not me, not now, please, someone help!”. Boys were stronger and, for sure, not fully cat-trained. Although it did not appear that the cat was happy for all this uninvited attention, somehow, he tolerated it and, at times, even asked for it.

Perhaps, the cat did not know any better. Still, the boys and the cat got so good at working together, that they started making funny cat videos and posting them on the internet. Yes, they are very funny. (Disclaimer: no child or animal was hurt during the filming even though the videos may suggest otherwise.

Check them out at SpartsAcademy.com)

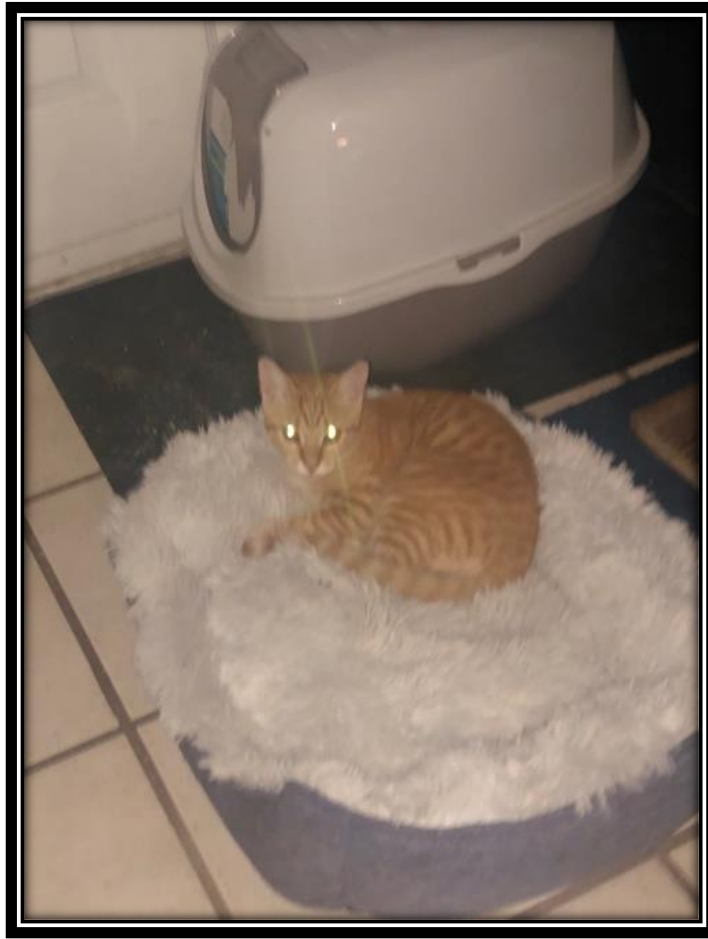
Ok, here we are, not wanting a cat, now we have a cat. Training for indoors, cat lives outside. A free rescue cat, in one month \$1000 in, and just getting started. The clean house is trashed again. Guinea pig went from happy hay-chewing to a scare-hide out in the cage fearing for its life. Not quite what we wanted but this cat simply would not be contained or tamed. He wanted freedom at all costs.

He was not much of a cat to begin with, Puss Tiger Stripes was more of a dragon stuck in a cat's body. Not knowing any better, he believed he is one of the boys. His sleeper was in the boy's bedroom. They all went to sleep at the same time and woke up at the same time. When we went for a walk, the cat followed. When we got in the car, the cat got in the car with us. Truly a member of the family.



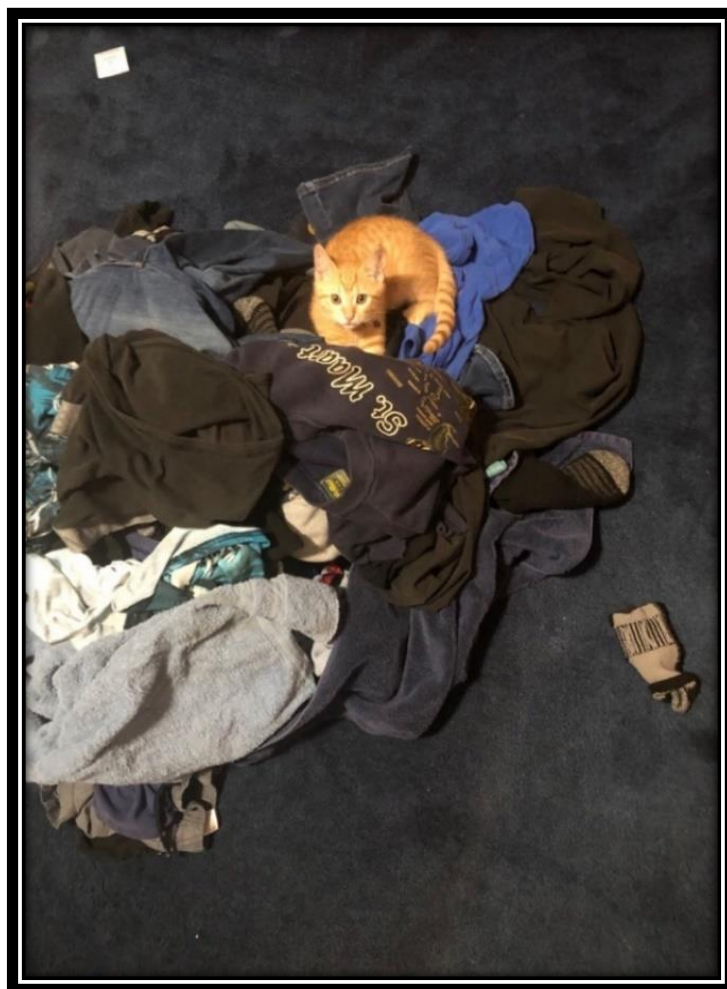
Truly a member of the family and now he is gone. Yep! Puss the Tiger Stripes went for a walk a few days ago and that is the last time we saw him. In reality, we do not know for sure what happened to him but we do have an idea. He has a microchip but no local shelter or neighbor knows anything about his whereabouts.





The night before he disappeared, Puss was chasing some creatures around the yard. He was excited, jumping, preying, and super alert, on the mission. I could not tell what he was after until I noticed the object of his senses, a frog. The frog was scared and tried to hide. He would go after it. There were many frogs out that night. So exciting for a cat! In the morning, our children corrected me and educated me that the frog was a toad, a Cane Toad. The good news is that we have many of them and could easily identify them. The bad news is that they are highly poisonous and have no predators.

No one knows for sure but we believe that the frog Puss played with was a Cane Toad, most likely the last Cane Toad the cat ever met. Licking or biting a Cane Toad gives the cat about 30 minutes left to live and Puss was not just observing from afar, he was on a mission to conquer and defeat the toad. Utilizing all kinds of senses like instinct to catch, sense of touch, smell, and taste, Puss did not have common sense, or a common cat sense yet. We still hope Puss the Tiger Stipes comes back one day. If he does not, may he rest in peace, forever and ever in cats' heaven where he most likely is today.



Puss the Tiger Stripes was a freedom fighter a small feline with a big heart that could not and would not be tamed. He longed to be free, dying to be free so much he ended up dying free alright. Did he live a good life? Maybe, a short one for sure. Still, it was a great life. He experienced love, family, adventure, the safety of a house as well as the wild nature.

Puss lived a short life but he lived a great life. Most of all, Puss experienced freedom. Once you taste freedom, you can never go back and be happy in bondage or even comfort. There is nothing like freedom! Puss Tiger Stripes left us as happy as a cat could ever be. Free yet still loved. Farewell, our feline friend. We will miss you. Free at last!! So long and good Prrrrrrrrrrr! Meow!!

We Love You Puss Tiger Stripes..

.Your "Human" Family

