

Katz is Human

by Hugo Myatt

OK, I know what you're going to say: 'Anthropomorphism is unscientific nonsense.' I, too, have read Desmond Morris. Well, don't you believe it — Katz is human.

Katz is my cat; or, as he sees it, I am his person. Zoologically speaking, he is a ginger tabby; but what a meagre description of such a personality! There you are, you see — personality, as in person: i.e. *homo sapiens*. How does one define personality? My dictionary defines it as 'the state of being a person; characteristics as perceived by others'. Well, Katz has got characteristics in plenty!

Jealousy

He is neurotic, a condition I put down to having suffered a severe physical loss at an early age. This neurosis comes out in several human ways. For instance, Katz is insanely jealous. The object of his jealousy is print; be it newsprint or books, he is determined to oust it. Anyone in our house foolhardy enough to pick up a book or a newspaper can guarantee that within seconds, a furry ginger lump will have interposed itself solidly between eye and print. Turning the page becomes impossible. The only solution to this problem is to have a diversionary reader, since Katz cannot be in two places at once. Recently he has included the keyboard in his campaign; I am having to use the overarm method to type this account.



Sulks

Should Katz be thwarted in his battle with newsprint, or indeed for any other reason, he will sulk. He has turned sulking into a minor art form. First, he finds a suitable bleak corner and sits face to the wall. Food and drink are steadfastly refused, and a hurt silence pervades the atmosphere. You try to stroke him; the fur rises at the nape of his neck, the tail curls closer, the face remains averted. After about five minutes — if you are lucky — a minute purr is detected. Now you must really strive. Stroking and cooing, you must work that tiny ember up into the warmth of human contact. Any premature relaxation will condemn you to icy coldness again.

Fads

Of course, it is a very selfish approach to personal relationships — but isn't that human too? If I had to categorise Katz's exact position in the family, it would be that of a wayward child. He is anarchical and irresponsible, yet demanding and dependent. Like all children he has fads, especially about food. If one day you find that he likes heart-flavoured cat food, it is a mistake to assume that he will go on liking it. In fact, buy a cupboard full of it and he will oblige you by being sick when you open the second tin. Even buying a tin of every known type does not always work. Katz will demonstrate his hunger by piteous whining; he is a consummate actor. In desperation you open five or six different tins; he turns up his nose at all of them. 'But you're hungry!' you shout. His exasperated stare makes it clear he is not hungry for *that*.

Actually, Katz prefers human fare. High-quality meats cooked in wine, herbs or garlic are all welcome. Even omelettes and custard puddings are appreciated. One thing Katz has not mastered is the portion system — or perhaps he has. Anyway, to him, enough is never sufficient. At mealtimes he resents special treatment; he may be shorter than the rest of us, but that is no reason to feed him on the floor. He would much prefer to join us up on the table. This battle has yet to be resolved to his satisfaction.

Cat door

Battles in general Katz rather relishes. He is very good on the psychological level; he believes that other people should be subordinate. To make life easier for him, and the family in general, we fitted a cat door. For a year he refused, on principle, to use it. He would stand at the door, first whining and then scratching until, finally, you let him out. The process would be repeated on the outside until you let him in. If you had been too slow about it, sulks would immediately follow. It wasn't until late one night, when I was quietly rewiring a plug, that Katz slithered stealthily in through the cat door. He stopped dead, guiltily, on seeing me and then, with a cheeky yelp, raced upstairs to hide.

Hide-and-seek is one of Katz's favourite games. He is fully conversant with the words 'vet', 'flea spray' and 'cattery'. Mention one of them in his presence and bang goes the cat door as he disappears for a couple of hours. Nowadays we make sure we catch him first before phoning the vet for an appointment.

Tail washing

Another game he loves to play is 'exercise the master'. This has that wonderful element of simplicity, and is usually played during a favourite television programme. Katz rises lazily from in front of the fire, stretches, and crosses to the door. There he sits, gazing longingly at the handle. Eventually, you tear yourself away from the set and open the door. Curiously, Katz is suddenly absorbed in washing his tail. Exasperated, you shut the door and sit down again. Just as you have got back into the plot, a frantic scratching erupts from the door. You rush to open it to save the paint. Katz goes out. Is that the end of it? Oh, no: five minutes later comes the sound of the hall carpet being torn up by the roots. You leap to the door; Katz is innocently washing his tail again. This game can go on *ad infinitum*. The only solution — his intention all along — is for you to sit in a draught and give him free access to come and go as he pleases.

Having come so far with my argument, though, I am beginning to have doubts. Perhaps Desmond Morris could be right and my interpretation is topsy-turvy. Could it be, after all, not so much that I endow Katz with human characteristics as that he endows me with feline ones?

[This article appeared in Woman and Home magazine in the UK, decades ago. Desmond Morris (mentioned at the beginning of the piece) is a naturalist and former curator of London Zoo who is well-known for his research into human and animal behaviour, and has written numerous books on the subject.]

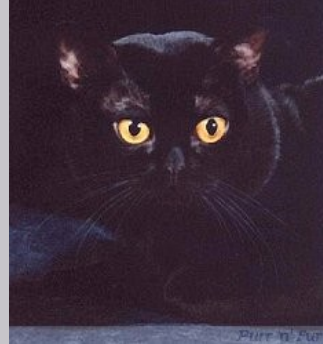
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Feline Fragments 6 (2006)

(page checked February 2026)

Colin (the cat) meets Colin (the US Secretary of State)
Libby and Cashew

Colin meets Colin The Secretary of State greet his namesake



Each year the American Cat Fanciers' Association (ACFA), founded in 1906 and the world's largest non-profit register of pedigree cats, holds a competition for the 'cat of the year'. It's usually won by one of the major breeds such as a Persian, a Maine Coon or a Siamese. However, in 2004 the winner, after a year of gruelling competition in which he was judged — and won — no fewer than 290 times, was a Bombay cat, a minority breed, named **Caricature's Colin Powell**.

He was named for 'a person of colour who made significant contributions to the world' — in this case, of course, the then Secretary of State for the US, Colin L. Powell. A photo opportunity was held at which the cat met his namesake, who declared him 'the best cat in the country'.



Secretary Powell also had the privilege of choosing a name for a kitten born on Independence Day, July 4th, a son of the celebrity cat. Mr Powell said that he would like to name the youngster after Ralph Bunche, the first black American to receive a Nobel Peace Prize and one with connections to the State Department as well as to the cause of peace. The kitten was duly named Caricature's Ralph Bunche.

For a fuller account of Mr Powell's speech and the event, see [this link](#) (2004).

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Libby and Cashew



Cashew, named for the shape of her ears, was a yellow Labrador-cross dog who was picked up as a puppy from the local ASPCA centre and went to live with the Burns family in Middleburg, Pennsylvania. When the dog was about 7 years old, in 1998, postal delivery worker Terry Burns came across two malnourished kittens huddling in a box in a pet shop and took them home to give them some love and care. He named the orange tabby **Libby**, because her fur was the colour of Libby's brand of canned pumpkins, and her shyer sister he called **Lucy**. He was not sure they would survive, but they thrived and grew into handsome cats.

Over the years, a friendship developed between Libby and Cashew. As time went by, Cashew became weaker and increasingly blind and deaf. She needed more assistance from her humans — and Burns noticed that Libby spent more and more time with the dog too, even sleeping in her kennel with her. The dog's feline friend took on the role of Cashew's personal guide, and they became inseparable. When Cashew was taken on a lead for her daily walk in nearby woods, Libby would sometimes follow, seeming to be concerned for her friend's well-

being. At home or outside, the cat would help by nuzzling Cashew's shoulder and steering her away from obstacles such as trees or furniture, so that she wouldn't bump into them. At mealtimes she would guide the dog towards her food and water dishes. It was a remarkable friendship, and without it Cashew would likely have been very lonely.

When the inevitable happened and Cashew died, for some time Libby would wander in and out of the kennel where they had shared a bed; but then she seemed to realise her friend had gone for good, and no longer showed any interest in the kennel or in walking in the woods. Instead she made herself a new home in a different part of the property with her littermate Lucy and **Gracie**, a silver tabby that Burns found abandoned on his postal route. Terry Burns' mother had entered Libby in a 'Hero Pet' photo contest run by *Reader's Digest* — and her story was picked up by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). She was chosen as the ASPCA 'Cat of the Year' in 2008 for her remarkable service as an intuitive and extraordinary guide for a disabled canine. Libby herself couldn't attend the presentation lunch at ASPCA headquarters in New York, but the Burnses proudly received the prestigious award on her behalf. As for Libby, she started to get along with Bessie, the family's large but gentle new black Labrador.



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