

Featured Felines: Escapes & Rescues 7

(page checked June 2026)

Cats rescued from Afghanistan **Koshka** (2013)



Jesse Knott was a decorated Staff Sergeant, with front-line experience with US forces in Iraq. Within a day or two of being deployed to Hotal in the Maiwand district of southern Afghanistan in June 2010, he came across a young stray cat who wandered in and out of the camp, and started to befriend him. At first quite amenable, a little later the cat began showing signs of being abused and fearful: a couple of times Jesse saw paint in his coat and on another occasion fur on his back had been shaved so close there were skin cuts. Then he showed up with a badly injured paw and a possible hip injury. Jesse treated the wounds and the pair bonded — he decided he had to adopt the little fellow, and named him **Koshka** (Russian for 'cat').



Soldiers aren't allowed pets, but for this deployment Jesse had been assigned a base job rather than the usual infantry duties, and consequently had a tiny office where he found space for Koshka — and the authorities turned a bit of a blind eye. In the middle of fighting a war, Jesse said the cat was a

reminder of normal life back home in Oregon City. 'You lose faith in a lot,' he said, 'but sometimes it's the smallest things that bring you back.'

Despair

However, the moment Koshka truly became 'family' was when a suicide-bomb attack took the lives of two of Jesse's platoon friends and injured others in December 2010. 'I was so devastated that I lost all hope. Two of my friends were violently taken away,' he said. He was in tears in his office when Koshka came over and crawled onto his lap. 'I had tears in my eyes; he locked eyes with me, reached out with his paw and pressed it to my lips, then climbed down into my lap, curled up and shared the moment with me. I'd lost hope in myself; I'd lost faith. Then all of a sudden this cat came over and it was like, "Hey, you're you.'" In that moment, Jesse said, he realised the cat couldn't stay in Afghanistan in the war zone, and his determination to keep Koshka safe was absolute. 'He pulled me out of one of my darkest times, so I had to pull him out of one of his darkest places.' It was an urgent requirement, as Knott was due to be redeployed and time was fast running out before he would have to leave Koshka behind at the camp and lose any control over his fate.



Dangerous rescue plan

After a number of phone calls and e-mails he eventually found the Afghan Stray Animals League (ASAL), who would take Koshka in and then arrange his trip to America – but first he had to get the cat to their shelter in the capital city of Kabul, halfway across the country to the north. It wasn't possible to get him on a military convoy but, with only about a week to go before Jesse was due to leave the camp, a local interpreter bravely said he'd take Koshka to Kabul, where he was taking a short spell of leave to visit family. If the Taliban had caught the Afghan at one of their innumerable checkpoints, doing a favour for an American, it would almost certainly have meant death for both him and the cat. 'The risk to him [*the interpreter*] was immense,' Jesse said. 'The cat was wearing a bright purple harness and was in an American-made cat carrier.'



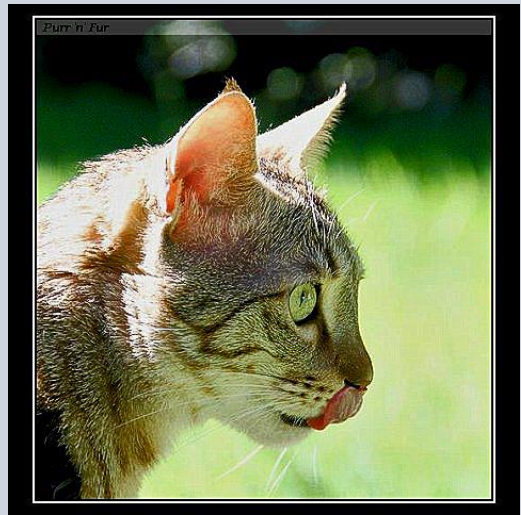
Safety

There were days without news before he heard that eventually Koshka had made it safely to Kabul, and it was about a month in all before the cat arrived in the States. At the ASAL shelter he was neutered and given his shots, and his papers and travel arrangements were organised. From Kabul he was flown to Islamabad in Pakistan, then via Europe to New York, and finally on to Portland, Oregon. The cost was almost 3000 dollars (nearly £2000 in 2013), raised by Jesse's parents, family and friends. For them, it was money well spent; there was no question for the family that their newest addition was worth the cost. 'He was my saving grace,' Jesse said. 'He kept me alive through that tour.'



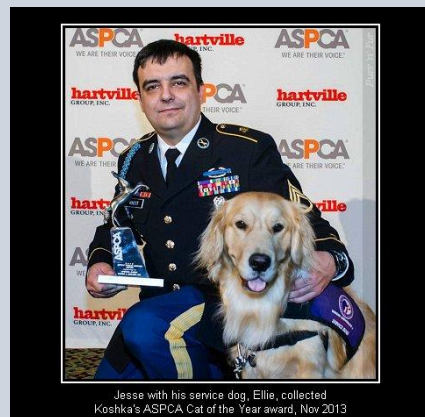
Back home

Staff Sergeant Knott was stationed in Washington state in early 2013, going home to Oregon City to see Koshka whenever he could.



The Oregon Humane Society's Diamond Collar Hero Award recognises 'both pets and people for remarkable achievements'. At the end of February 2013 Koshka and Jesse received the award for their 'selflessness and courage' (*below*): the OHS have posted a touching [video clip](#) at YouTube. As they comment near the end, 'Sometimes we save an animal. Sometimes, an animal saves us.'

Later in 2013, as mentioned on his Facebook page, Koshka was featured in an article in the American *Cat Fancy* magazine (July); and in November he won the ASPCA's Cat of the Year award. Koshka didn't attend the luncheon in New York as Jesse felt he had been through enough travel stress to last a lifetime when he was brought out of Afghanistan; but Jesse went with his service dog, Ellie, to accept the award.



Towards the end of 2013 Jesse was due to leave the US Army, having completed eight years' military service, and was considering becoming a certified service dog trainer.

Update: It was sad indeed to read on his Facebook page of Koshka's death from an aggressive cancer in March 2025. He was a very special cat, and it was so good to know that, following his rescue from Afghanistan, he'd gone on to live a happy life for some 15 years with Jesse Knott and his family in Oregon. There are some lovely tributes on his page, and I think he'll long be remembered.

Links

- ❖ [Koshka at Facebook](#). *(current late 2024 although little used)*
- ❖ *Huffington Post*, Mar 2013: [Sgt. Jesse Knott Saves Abused Cat In Afghanistan](#) – includes news clip.
- ❖ *PandEcats.com*, Apr 2013: [The Soldier & The Cat](#). *(archived copy)*
- ❖ *OregonLive/The Oregonian*, Nov 2013: [Oregon City 'hero cat' that rescued soldier to be honored by ASPCA](#) *(archived copy)* - a recap of the story and later news.
- ❖ *About.com Cats*, Nov 2013: [Koshka, ASPCA 2013 Cat of the Year](#) - includes email interview with Jesse. *(archived copy, but no interview)*
- ❖ *Examiner*, Nov 2013: [Koshka is receiving an award](#) *(archived copy)* - another interview with Jesse.
- ❖ [Animal Rescue blog](#) Very interesting take on Koshka's story by Jesse Knott's mother, 2022 /

More Afghan Rescue Cats (2014)

Mousetrap; Tinker Bell; Miss Kitty

Mousetrap

[Koshka](#) is far from the only animal, or the only cat, to have been befriended by soldiers and taken home, usually to the United States, and there are a few organisations that help with the formalities and arrange travel. In early October 2013 both the Soldiers' Animal Companions (SAC) Fund and Nowzad ran an appeal on Facebook that raised the necessary funds within a day to send a cat called **Mousetrap** from Afghanistan to the US, to be reunited with the soldier who couldn't bear to leave her behind when his tour of duty was done, and she successfully made the journey to Indiana soon afterwards.

Her story is best told in her soldier Edward Gordon's own words, very slightly edited. (Forward Operating Base Sharana was located in the Paktika Province of eastern Afghanistan. It was a hub for many, if not most, of the construction projects and training that went on in Afghanistan.)



I was stationed at FOB Sharana for almost six months. Shortly after my arrival I saw a cat in the shadows around my living area. It was very elusive for a long time. I'd put food out for it and the food would disappear by morning. Several months went by without actually seeing the cat, until one day she walked into my room while my door was open! She was friendly as could be, and we bonded instantly.

She seemed to be able to sense danger and would sometimes disappear. She had a keen sense of smell and started showing up down near our work area, where our Indian friends would always be cooking food. Despite all the chaos in our everyday lives while at Sharana, she'd always seem to come around and put smiles on our faces, making us feel a little bit closer to home. I really dreaded the time when I'd have to depart and leave her to fend for herself.

Well, the day came when we started packing up and tearing down most of the wooden structures around our compound. She'd had several safe havens where she'd hide and now they were gone. I hadn't seen her in a few days and figured she'd taken refuge somewhere else. On one of the final days of cleaning up, to my surprise, she appeared out of nowhere!

I looked over and saw her sitting on a jersey barrier. The funny thing is that she was sitting on my small backpack as if she were trying to tell me something! At this point I knew that I couldn't leave her behind.

With only a few days left before flying out, I needed a plan, and quickly. My only option was to leave her with some friends in another unit who'd be around for another couple of months. They had a problem with mice and gladly looked after her for me until I could figure something out. I had to leave, but I left some contact info with everyone and told them that I was serious about trying to take Mousetrap home. I found Nowzad and almost before I knew it a plan came together and after a 100-mile taxi ride she was safe and sound at their shelter.

This was my first tour in Afghanistan, but I did four tours in Iraq and cared for cats, as for some reason they'd always seek me out. It was the same story: not wanting to leave them behind to live a horrible life. This little kitty stole my heart and I'm going to do everything I can to get her back to my home in Indiana where she'll be a house cat without a worry in the world. She'll have three cat brothers to greet her (Rufus, Snapper and Nike). Thanks for all the help and support!



Mousetrap in Afghanistan



At home in Indianapolis

[Life with Cats](#) (Jan. 2015 – archived copy)

Tinker Bell

At the time of writing (mid-December 2013) **Tinker Bell** (aka Tinker) was in the process of being rescued from Afghanistan by the soldier who befriended him: 'in the process' because money was being raised to fund his return to the United States, and well over half the required sum of 2900 US dollars had already been donated. As with Mousetrap, Nowzad and the SAC Fund were handling his case.

The cat was abandoned and living in the cold when the soldier found him shivering and looking for food. At first he was wary, as would be expected, but an offering of tuna was too tempting to resist and so he followed his new friend into his small room, which was nice and warm. After some stroking and being talked to, Tinker Bell was purring and feeling better; and he was able to curl up on the soldier's bed. As they got to know each other better the soldier, due to return home before long, was determined that he would offer his new friend a better life, and so the help of the charities was enlisted. I didn't find any follow-up information about him, though.



Miss Kitty (aka Miss Kittie)

Also from 2013 comes the story of another US soldier who befriended a cat that he couldn't bear to leave behind. The soldier, who says his name was unimportant, had been in Afghanistan some 18 months and was finding it all a very long way from the life he was used to in Texas. One day a little cat approached him and it seemed as though she was trying to tell him something. He took her to his room, gave her some cat food from a stock he'd acquired previously, and she stayed for over two hours with him.

He didn't see her again for a couple of weeks, and was afraid she'd been taken away, so was relieved when she returned to visit. That time she stayed for three hours before going off again. The next time she came, he knew he had to make arrangements for her to go back to the States. Nowzad was contacted and agreed to help, so **Miss Kitty** went to them for her vaccinations, to be spayed and to await the necessary funds for her transport (about \$3000 at the time). When the money had been raised, she flew to Texas to be reunited with her soldier and to be safe, well-cared for and loved. 'She gave companionship no human could understand,' he said.





[Life with Cats](#) (Aug. 2013 – archived copy)

Clyde

One more story from 2013 concerns **Clyde** (or Clyde Clinton Deveraux, to give her full name), So named by contractors who had been caring for her, she'd been at the US base in Helmand for quite some time, at least a couple of years. Late in 2012 the contractors moved to Camp Bastion and took the cat with them. Hanging around the entry point, she came to the attention of animal-loving soldiers and started spending more time with them. One soldier in particular, not named, grew attached to her and worried about what would happen to her when the people who had cared for her left the country; he felt she'd been there long enough and wanted to give her a loving home.

No details are available, but it seems his goal was achieved, and it was reported that Clyde made it safely to the United States with the help of Nowzad. She was said to be settling in well with Aela the dog and Tinkerbelle the cat (presumably not the same Tinker Bell as mentioned above).





[LoveMeow](#) (Sept. 2013) | [Facebook](#) (2013)

Felix

It was back in 2008 that Christine Bouldin was serving in Afghanistan, and that's when a special little kitten came into her life. 'I'd never seen a cat like that,' she said. 'She couldn't stand up and would flip over; I felt really sorry for her.' It turned out that the kitten had cerebellar hypoplasia, the disorder that affects motor skills but isn't progressive. Christine fell in love with her, named her **Felix**, and determined that she'd take her back to America when her tour of duty was over.



Christine paid \$300 to have Felix driven from her base to a shelter in the capital Kabul – just over an hour's drive but always with the risk of roadside IEDs; luckily all went well. Some months later as she returned to the States, she paid \$2000 for the kitten to be transported. 'I didn't care what I had to pay,' she said, believing the cost to be well worth it.

In 2023 Felix was still living with Christine, her husband and their male cat in Lakewood, Colorado. Christine says the cat has helped her through a lot of tough times.



[Facebook](#) (Just a snippet of info; don't know what the Cornell University has to do with it. The link given is no longer valid.)

Withdrawal from Afghanistan

During the time of the occupation of Afghanistan by Western forces, there were several organisations – largely in the capital, Kabul – that did their best to take in and look after sick or injured cats, dogs and other animals. An important part of their work was helping to arrange transport out of the country for pets that had been befriended by service personnel, or contractors, who wished to adopt them and take them home at the end of their tour of duty (such as Koshka, Tinker Bell and others: see above).

With the United States' decision to withdraw from Afghanistan in 2021 after a 20-year war with questionable achievements, and the corresponding withdrawal of the UK's and other coalition troops too, the way became clear for the Taliban to take back control of the country. That happened much more quickly than anticipated, in early August 2021. It then became a scramble for many Western organisations, as well as thousands of Afghan residents, to leave the country while it was still possible. The Taliban set a date of 31 August for evacuations to end, leading to chaos and heart-breaking scenes at Kabul airport as desperate people tried to gain entry and get onto a plane. Animal welfare wasn't, and isn't, on the Taliban's agenda, so it became necessary to try to arrange evacuation for the staff of the animal-welfare organisations and the small animals in their care. After much fund-raising, planning, hard work, setbacks and frustration, two evacuation flights were eventually successful: one by Nowzad in late August, just before the deadline, which flew to London, and one in February 2022 to Vancouver in Canada, organised by KSAR. Together these two flights carried some 450 cats and dogs to safety.

Below are more details of some of the organisations that worked in Afghanistan.

Nowzad

The animal-rescue charity Nowzad – formerly Nowzad Dogs, although it didn't deal exclusively with dogs – based in the UK, was one such organisation. Founded by former Royal Marine commando Paul 'Pen' Farthing, its name came from a dog he befriended while serving in the country and sought to return to Britain when his tour of duty ended; it was one of the dogs involved in a street-dog fight he and his colleagues had broken up in the town of Nawzad. Paul became inspired to set up a charity to help reunite other servicemen with dogs and cats they had befriended in the country, and to organise TNR (trap-neuter-return) facilities for the stray street animals of Kabul. The charity also assisted with recovering companion animals from other conflict zones, including Iraq, and their transport to new homes in the US, Canada, the UK and elsewhere.

When the evacuation crisis in Afghanistan began, Farthing aimed to evacuate some 170 animals (94 dogs, 79 cats), along with the charity's Afghan staff and their families. After innumerable setbacks, delays and frustrations, he was finally able to leave for Britain with the animals in a chartered plane – but without the staff, whom the Taliban claimed had incorrect paperwork.

Paul and the animals landed safely at London's Heathrow airport on 29 August; the animals were health-checked and went into quarantine pending finding new homes; Pen flew to Oslo to spend time with his Norwegian wife, while planning to work on the problem of getting the charity's staff evacuated by any means possible. With his continued efforts and persistence, many of the Nowzad staff were finally able to be evacuated to Britain, via Pakistan, after a few more weeks. See [Wikipedia](#)

Not all the Nowzad staff were able to leave, and some stayed because of family; those that remain continue to run the charity's clinic in the face of considerable ongoing difficulties, and do their best to help the many needy animals of Kabul. [Website](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#)

From 2022 Nowzad also became involved in the rescue of cats and dogs from the conflict in Ukraine.



Part of the Nowzad 'menagerie' awaiting entry to Kabul airport

KSAR

Kabul Small Animal Rescue is another organisation still operating in the Afghan capital and doing its best to help animals there, also arranging flights to the USA for some. After much frustration and seemingly endless delays, they were finally able to organise a second evacuation flight, for about 300 cats and dogs. A large plane took off from Kabul bound for Vancouver in Canada, with stops for refuelling and vet checks in Ankara, Turkey and Keflavik, Iceland. On 2 February they arrived safely at

a prepared special facility in Vancouver. Some already had owners waiting (such as Tay Tay – see below), while the others were put up for adoption. A short [video](#) shows the plane on arrival at Vancouver airport. See also [this link](#).

KSAR at [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#)



Ilyushin cargo plane of the kind used for the evacuation



A check on the animals



Turkish team doing welfare and veterinary checks during the Ankara stopover

Afghan Stray Animal League (ASAL)

ASAL, a charity registered in the United States, since 2004 has operated a small animal shelter and veterinary clinic called Tigger House in Kabul, and continues to do so. The full-time Afghan staff of 10, with an English-speaking manager, takes in homeless, sick or injured cats and dogs, with the occasional bird, rabbit or monkey. It provides vaccinations (including against rabies), spaying and neutering, and treatment for a variety of ailments. It was ASAL that organised the successful journey back to the United States of [Koshka](#). The charity doesn't seem to have a social-media presence. [Website](#)

Soldiers' Animal Companion Fund (SAC)

SAC had tax-deductible status for donations raised in the US, and promoted the welfare and rescue of companion animals in war-torn Middle Eastern countries where American troops were stationed...It also helped to raise money for Nowzad Dogs and War Dogs Making it |Home (*below*).

It seems that by 2022 SAC was no longer operating. There's no active website, the [Facebook](#) page was last used in early 2017, and the [Twitter](#) page in December 2018.

War Dogs Making it Home

This is a US charity taking dogs from shelters to train as assistance dogs for returning service personnel suffering from PTSD or brain injury. There's an informative page all about it, originally posted by the SAC Fund; it's now available as an [archived copy](#) (undated) The charity's own website is [here](#).

Paws of War

The Long Island-based non-profit organisation since 2014 has used donations to pay for some 600 animals to be relocated to the US. The cost is high, from \$6000 to \$10,000 each, with the necessary vet visits, vaccinations, paperwork and of course the actual transport. Paws of War also pays for 28 days of quarantine upon arrival in America. Around 80% of animals are shipped out to family members or foster homes before the soldier's tour of duty ends; in other cases volunteers are found to look after them until shipment can be arranged. [Website](#)

Other rescue organisations

Some other organisations involved in rescuing animals – mostly dogs – from war zones include Home Again, Operation Baghdad Pups, Puppy Rescue Mission and Wartorn Pups. There are brief details as at 2020 [here](#).

Later Feline Rescues

Following the KSAR evacuation flight described above, the stories of a couple of other individual cats emerged.

Screech



Screech was formerly a cat at the US Embassy in Kabul, where she was much loved. When she developed stomatitis, a painful inflammation inside the mouth that made it difficult for her to eat, she was sent to Kabul Small Animal Rescue (KSAR) for treatment, although it seems the problem wasn't permanently dealt with at the time. When the Taliban took control in Afghanistan in August 2021, she became part of KSAR's planned evacuation of cats and dogs (*above*), but not before she'd been exposed to tear gas at the airport.

It wasn't until February 2022 that KSAR's evacuation was finally able to take place, but Screech was on the plane. While some animals had people waiting for them in Canada, Screech did not – but in April she finally received, in British Columbia, the dental treatment she needed to free her entirely from pain. And by late May she had been rehomed with a loving family, where she has two feline friends; I have no details, but it seems her troubles at last were over. She has an [Instagram](#) account, with numerous photos of her enjoying a happy and relaxed life. There's a short video of her [here](#).

In April 2024 Screech underwent surgery to remove a malignant tumour in her shoulder, but seemed to be making a good recovery, and in late 2024 she was still doing well. In September 2025, though, it was announced that she'd died. She'd had a great three and a half years or so with her loving family.

Tay Tay

Gary Ash was a NATO officer working in Kabul at the Resolute Support Mission, situated next to the US Embassy. There were some 10 cats there on mouse-catching duties; they had clipped left ears to show they were working cats. They weren't supposed to be touched or petted, but Gary was a 'cat person' and would slip them the odd treat or snack. One of them in particular stood out to him, a three-year-old tabby female known as **Tay Tay**; she took a liking to him and would follow him around the base. They formed a bond (*photo below*).

When Gary had to leave in June 2021 he wasn't allowed to take the cat with him, but he left her with a friend at the embassy who would look after her. But then came the events of August that year, when the Taliban took over the country and Western organisations, including NATO, had to leave. Gary learned that Tay Tay had been entrusted to KSAR, who were in the process of trying to evacuate a number of cats and dogs (*see above*). After seemingly endless delays, frustration and fund-raising, during which time some of the cats were exposed to tear gas at the airport, KSAR's work finally paid off and the animals left on a flight to Vancouver in Canada in February 2022. Tay Tay was on the plane, with manifest number Cat 0001.



When the plane landed at Vancouver Gary was waiting. He'd been hoping for a warm cuddle – but Tay Tay, in her carrier, was petrified. He took her to his hotel room, released her and gave her some food. She found a spot to hide, but did eat, and gradually started to warm up towards Gary, perhaps recognising him as a friend after her ordeals. He was able to put a harness onto her, a requirement for her onward flight to home in California; but nevertheless she managed to slip out of it at airport security, and it took nearly an hour and five security personnel to retrieve her!

But finally she made it to Gary's home in Vacaville, where she could begin to unwind, with a napping spot on a lambxkin and a familiar Afghan rug under a favourite chair (*below*). 'We'd been apart for six months and she's been through hell,' said Gary. 'It's an extraordinary feeling to have her home.'

[CTV News](#) (Feb. 2022) | [YouTube](#)



Jack from Kosovo

American troops still form part of the peace-keeping force in Kosovo after 25 years – and that’s where Daniel Rueda, from a National Guard unit, met **Jack**, a little black cat. He turned up at the base one day when Daniel was having lunch; animals weren’t supposed to be allowed on the base, but they would come and go at the entrance gate. Jack seemed to have managed to sneak in, and ‘strutted around the barracks as if he owned the place’. Everyone liked him, even Daniel’s staff sergeant.



When Jack became stuck on the base for three months following an injury, he welcomed Jack’s visits, as playing with him helped to relieve the boredom; he would feed the cat bits of chicken, and soon formed a bond with him. When his time to leave came, ‘I couldn’t stand the idea of leaving him there and not knowing what happened to him.’ said Daniel. Paws of War stepped in, flew Jack back to quarantine in the States – and then during April 2024 he was driven to Rhode Island and reunited with Daniel, who by then was back home. ‘He’s home with me, he’s exploring and he’s happy,’ said Daniel.



[Washington Post](#) (April 2024)

Note: For another cat rescued from Kosovo much earlier, see [Featuring / Escapes & Rescues 5](#).

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Salem from Romania

An American soldier called Justin, serving in Romania in 2016, came across a little black kitten, one of the thousands of stray animals in that country. He was able to take the little soul back to his base, and they quickly formed a strong bond. The kitten, now named **Salem**, had a big personality and brought comfort and a small taste of home life to other soldiers too. He particularly liked to snuggle up in Justin's helmet.

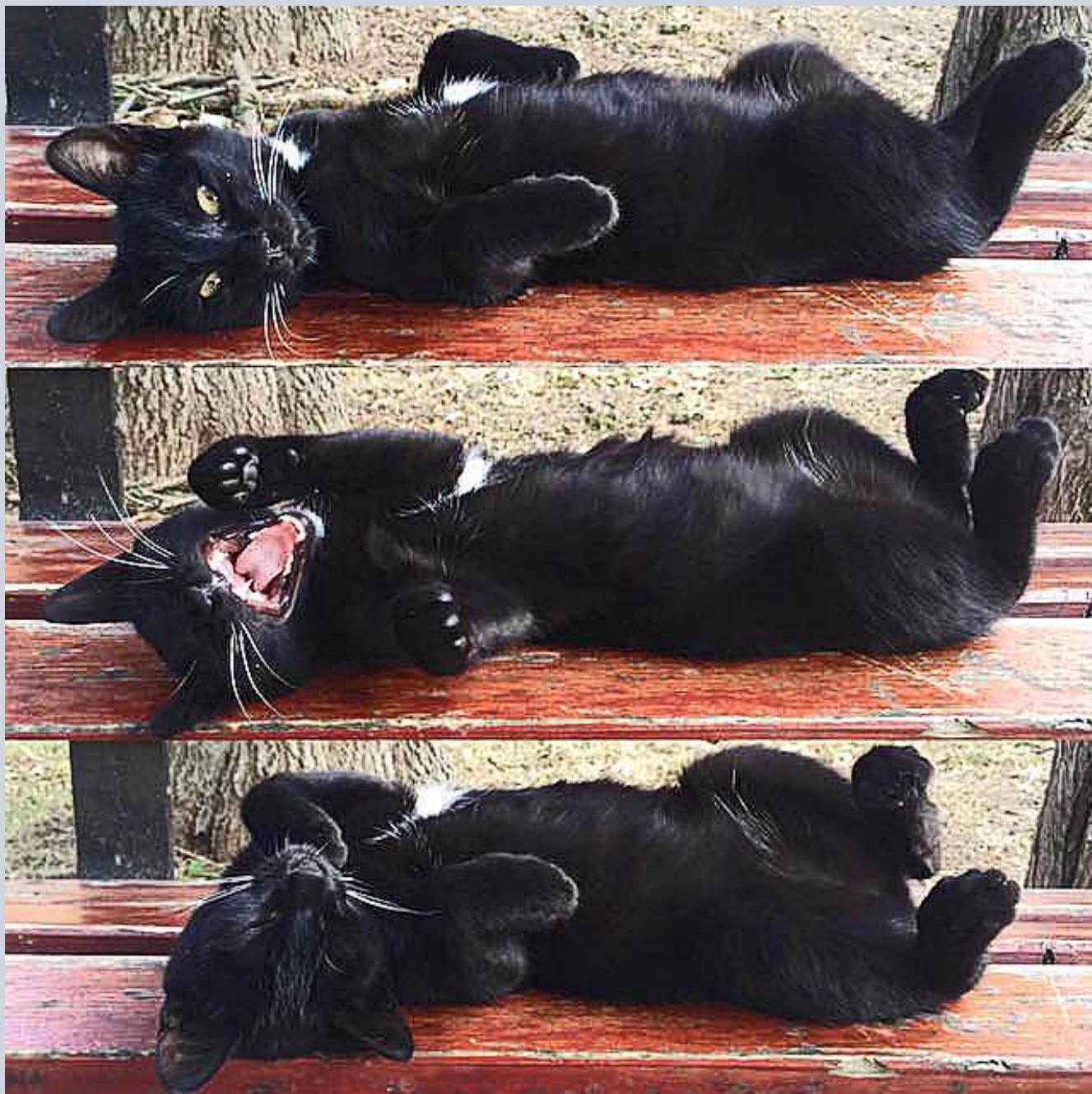


As it was early autumn and winter would be arriving before too long, with all the additional problems that it could bring for stray animals, Justin was keen to raise money to cover the cost of taking Salem back to the United States. A GoFundMe appeal raised over US\$4000, which was more than enough to cover the expense; the surplus was given to local animal charities, including Oana's Homeless Street Paws. That was the clinic where Salem stayed while getting his vaccinations and the formalities sorted out for his journey.



[LoveMeow](#) (Sept. 2016)

For a few cats rescued from Iraq during the war there, see **Featuring / War / Land & Air** (at the end of the 'Land' section) and also **Featuring / Esxapes & Rescues 8** (a 'civilian' cat rescued from Iraq).



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