

Featured Felines: Cats with special needs 3 (2014)

(page checked June 2026)

Cats with Burns

**Justin of Philadelphia; Bernice of Wisconsin; Dutchess of Illinois;
Fire Cat of Derby, England; Russell of North Carolina; Arthur from Worcester, England**

See also Scarlett, blaze heroine: Purr 'n' Fur / Famous

**Justin –
found alight
in
Philadelphia,
USA**



Justin was found severely burned one day in late April 2013 by a good Samaritan in the Kensington section of North Philadelphia. The tiny, 5-week-old baby, weighing just a pound (450 grams), had been doused with an accelerant and set on fire — in fact was still burning when found by his rescuer, who smothered the fire with a jacket. The Pennsylvania SPCA looked for whoever burned the kitten, and there was a substantial reward offered by HSUS (Humane Society of the United States), but unfortunately the perpetrator was never found and brought to justice.



Justin received medical attention at Crown Veterinary Specialists, an emergency and specialist vet practice, to deal with the burns he had over about a third of his body, mostly on his head and back, and then was cared for by the Animal Alliance of New Jersey. He

responded well to treatment, started to show his mischievous side, began to put on weight and was expected to make a good recovery in due course; however much of his pinnae (external ears) had to be removed and bald patches were likely to remain on his back. His story became known worldwide, such that his medical bills were not only paid for but well exceeded: they paid for his ongoing return to full health, neutering and still left some over for Animal Alliance of New Jersey to put towards other deserving cases. Animal Alliance initially provided updates on Justin's progress at their Facebook page; many offers to rehome him were received, but first he was fostered by one of his veterinary carers.

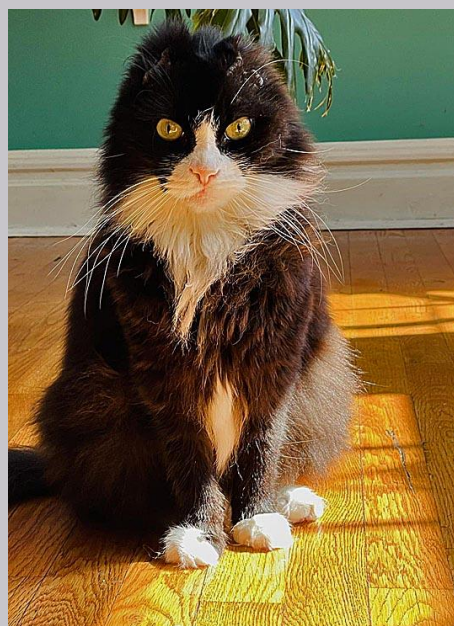


By late July 2013 he had a new loving home in New Jersey with a lady known as Kelley, and his own, very much visited Facebook page (*see links below*) to take up his story and progress. His fur has regrown and, other than his damaged ears, he is hard to recognise as the same cat that suffered the terrible burns. Justin's story and his Facebook page — at first frequently added to and written as though by Justin himself, who calls himself 'Jman' — have done much to help, and raise awareness of, other feline victims.

Links

The Star-Ledger comprehensively covered Justin's story through to his adoption with articles, photo galleries and video clips, and these are listed first. *(All archived copies)*

- ❖ 1 May 2013: [Kitten burned in Philly recovering at Hunterdon County vet](#) *(no video because no Flash Player)* - includes gallery and 1st video clip (1:15).
- ❖ 7 May 2013: [Surgery performed on kitten found burning in Philadelphia](#).
- ❖ 9 May 2013: [Kitten found burning in Philadelphia recovers after surgery in Hunterdon](#).
- ❖ 9 May 2013: [Badly burned Justin the kitten gets outpouring of donations and adoption offers](#) (
- ❖ 24 May 2013: [Justin the kitten released from vet, investigators still searching for attacker](#)
- ❖ 2 Aug 2013: [Justin the Kitten has no ears, but has a new home in N.J. and personality to spare](#) .
- ❖ **Justin at Facebook**. *(still alive but seldom used now, mid-2026)*
- ❖ Animal Alliance of New Jersey: [website](#) and at [Facebook](#) *(mostly dogs)*; and also at Facebook their page of [many images of Justin](#) (April 2013). The Alliance doesn't appear to have coverage on their main website about Justin.
- ❖ Pennsylvania SPCA, Apr 2013: [Information Sought Regarding Kitten Set on Fire](#). *(archived copy)*
- ❖ Crown Veterinary Specialists & Emergency: [Facebook](#).
- ❖ YouTube clip (also available at the LoveMeow page above): [Burned kitten Justin fights his way back to health](#). *(Video unavailable – account terminated, not archived.)*



Summer 2023 – very handsome!

In April 2026 Justin was 14 years old and doing well.

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Bernice

Oshkosh, Wisconsin, USA (2011)

In mid-July 2011 a young female cat was found severely burned on a street on Oshkosh, a city in the state of Wisconsin. There had been no reports of any fires or blazes anywhere nearby at the time, and although no perpetrator was found, it looked very much as though the animal had been subject to a deliberate, cruel and callous act.

She was taken to the Oshkosh Area Humane Society and then to the Oshkosh Animal Hospital. Her eyebrows and whiskers were singed onto her face and her ears were literally crisp; eventually it became apparent that she had burns on some 60 per cent of her body. She was bandaged from head to toe, as doctors tried their best to manage her pain while the healing process began. Often an animal so severely burned would have been put to sleep, but her doctors said she seemed to be a warm and loving soul and showed such a fighting spirit and strong will to live that she deserved to be given a chance. Staff named her **Bernice**. So many people were shocked by what had happened to her that numerous donations were made towards her treatment, and her progress was followed by a large number of fans and admirers. There was also a fund for a reward to go to anyone who could find out who was responsible for her plight.



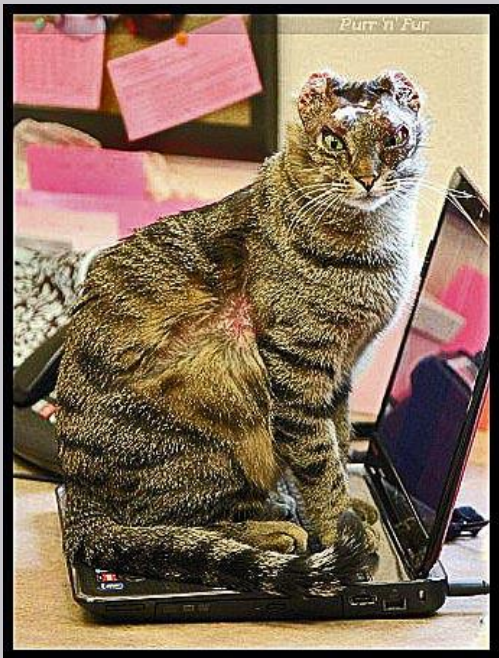
In the first few weeks she made remarkable progress. One of the hospital staff working with her made a [video recording her treatment and progress](#) (*no longer available: needed Flash ...*)— it was very sensitively done, although not comfortable viewing. By mid-August 2011 her doctor and 'special care person', Becky Bosetski, was writing an interesting and [optimistic assessment](#), although she warned of possible future problems, and said Bernice's fur would probably not grow back on the most severely burned areas. She'd need a very special home; and Dr Bosetski said that before any future surgery was carried out it'd be important to assess its impact on the cat and how she would cope with it, and not just go ahead 'because it could be done'.

In late August [the hospital released a short video](#) (*no longer available – private*) showing Bernice playing and behaving like a cat. By late October 2011 considerable further progress had been made and Bernice was eating well, looking much better and still enjoying a play: [NBC news report](#) (*archived, but video needed Flash*)

She had a white cat friend called George (*below left*), and plenty of animal soft toys, of which her favourite was a pink teddy bear. There are some pictures of Bernice with her toys, and with George, at the [Life with Cats](#) site (Sept. 2011). She was reported to be suffering from a little 'cabin fever', but a later report from the Humane Society (early December 2011) brought the news that 'Dr Becky' was on maternity leave, having given birth to a baby girl, and that Bernice was spending most of her time between Dr Becky's house and that of her vet technician Dyan. She thus spent the 2011 Christmas holidays outside the clinic, and enjoyed her time with the families. There's an amusing short clip at [YouTube](#) of another cat, called Ozzy, watching a video of Bernice playing.



By March 2012 further news and images showed remarkable progress: It was reported that Bernice wouldn't be put up for adoption; rather, she'd be going to live with a member of the Oshkosh Animal Hospital staff.



Later in the year the hospital stopped giving regular reports, and by the end of 2012 Bernice had 'retired from the limelight and was living happily with her family'. There's a Facebook page called [Bernice's Legacy](#) (last used March 2022), which seems to be run by some of her fans, and appears to be mostly about other injured cats and kittens needing help, and there's another called [Justice for Bernice](#).(last used 2017). Despite a few requests, there has been no later news of Bernice..

In mid-2026 the Facebook pages remain operational, but with little news. However, in January 2025 it was reported on the 'Legacy' page by her owner's daughter that Bernice was doing well. She said she was going to post pictures, but they seem not to have materialised.

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Dutchess

Saybrook, Illinois, USA (2012)



In September 2012 **Dutchess**, of Saybrook, Illinois in the USA, seen above as a youngster, was rescued from a house fire that destroyed her family's home and all their possessions; the family dog also died. Dutchess was found taking refuge under a sofa, but was badly burned and wasn't expected to survive. However, like Bernice whose story is above, the six-month-old cat showed tremendous resilience and a strong will to live. Wrapped in a wet towel, she was taken to Central Illinois Small Animal Rescue, and then a few days later to the University of Illinois' Small Animal Clinic. The University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine *Illinois Vet News* of October 2012 said: 'She has been lovable and purring through all of her treatments and has stolen the hearts of all who work with her.'

Owing to the extent of her burns — on face, chest, torso, legs and paws, and with a flea collar melted into her skin — she was having trouble breathing, because of smoke and debris on her lungs, and the possibility of infection was a concern. Her eyes also needed attention. Owner Jackie Jones's insurance didn't cover Dutchess's treatment, so a Facebook page was started by Toni Day, one of the firefighters who had helped to rescue her, to share the kitten's story and invite donations for her care, which cost around 110 US dollars (some £70) a day. A goal of 5,000 dollars was set; when that had been raised any further donations were used to replenish the University's emergency fund, from which the University had given 500 dollars towards the treatment.



Dutchess stayed at the U. of I. until early January of 2013, when she was allowed home — with Toni and her partner Christy — which she shared with four other cats and kittens and two dogs! Original owner Jackie could visit and spend time with Dutchess whenever she wanted. Of course Dutchess needed ongoing care, but as of April 2013 she was recovering well, was expected to retain much of her vision and eventually return to a normal life. She endeared herself to her caregivers with her sweet and loving personality.

She had orthopaedic surgery to correct some issues with her paws, as she was having some difficulty in walking normally. Her progress could be followed, and of course there are numerous images and video clips at the [Facebook page](#) (*page still available mid-2026– now called 'In Memory of Dutchess Day'*), where Toni and Christy continued to provide updates and photos while Dutchess was still alive.



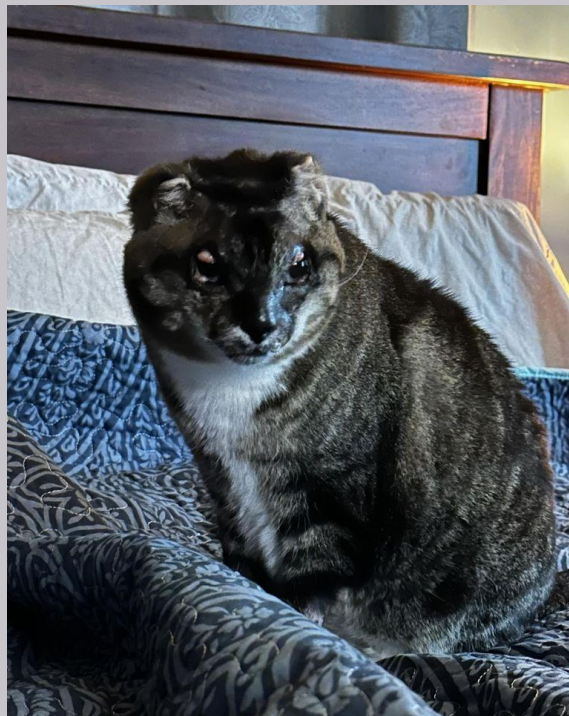
Other links

- *News-Gazette*, September 2012: [Donations from around the world help with burned cat's medical care](#) (*archived copy*)
- *Life with Cats*, January 2013: [Dutchess, healing cat in transition](#)
- *Pantagraph*, January 2013: [Kitten badly burned in fire goes home](#) (*archived copy*)

Update:

In April 2021 Dutchess was living happily in her 'forever home'. See the Photos section of the Facebook page (link above).

But on 11 November 2022 her human wrote: '... Dutchess has reached the end of her quality lifespan – she did use a lot of lives just to keep living. She enjoyed almost 10 years with us and will be going to the Rainbow Bridge today. She will be departing from us here at home with the help of a wonderful vet. We are currently enjoying our final hours with her, and she even consented to a photo. It's time for her finally to be pain-free and to join her friends waiting at the Rainbow Bridge.'



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'Fire Cat' (2020)

Derby, England



One day in mid-September 2020 Derby police officers came across a badly burned kitten in Normanton Road in the city. His face was burned, his ears and whiskers were charred and his fur singed; in addition his paw-pads were 'fried' and his claws burnt off. Thought to be only about seven weeks old, the little patient was rushed to the Pride Veterinary Centre. He must have been in a lot of pain, was very weak and it wasn't certain he'd survive – in fact staff even considered whether he should be put to sleep to save further suffering. However, he showed a 'surprising' desire to eat, so it seemed he wanted to live and thus it was decided to treat him and do the best possible for him.

He was put on fluids, his wounds cleaned and dressed, his eyes flushed and his paws wrapped in clingfilm to help them heal. After a couple of days he began to feel better, and as no one had claimed him vet nurse Jenni Gretton took him home to foster him. She bathed him several times a day, put Vaseline on his burns and generally gave him all the care he needed. After a week or so his fur began to fall out and new fur grew underneath; but because the burnt skin on his face tightened, the eyelids 'turned inside out', leaving his eyes sore and putting him at risk of losing his sight. An expensive operation was needed; Jenni started a fundraising campaign – and within six hours the necessary £2000 had been raised and exceeded!



Named **Fire Cat**, the little soul made a good recovery and before too long was enjoying exploring his new home, playing with the family's two cross-breed Cavalier dogs, and taking naps. It isn't thought his ordeal had been malicious; maybe as a curious kitten he'd just got too close to a bonfire or somehow got caught up in it.

[ITV](#) | [Birmingham Mail](#) | [Derby Telegraph](#) (all Oct. 2020)

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Raleigh, North Carolina, USA



In January 2014 Lela May Strickland's house in Raleigh burned down; the family lost all their possessions, including their dog Barney, and their cat Russell disappeared; they feared he was also lost. But he was found four days later, seriously burned and barely alive. He was rushed to the Animal Emergency Hospital and Urgent Care, with burns over much of his body, and his ear tips burned off. Expensive surgery would be needed to save his life; the hospital knew that the Stricklands wouldn't be able to contribute much financially, but the decision was made that Russell's needs would be met and they'd sort out the finances later.

In fact what happened was that when Russell's [story](#) (Jan. 2014) was posted on the hospital's [Facebook](#) page, it quickly spread and get-well cards, toys, gifts and most importantly financial donations began to pour in. In the end enough money was received to cover all his medical bills, and he continued to receive gifts and toys for quite a while afterwards. Russell turned out to be a model patient, not needing to be sedated to have his dressings changed. And as he recovered during his long and enforced hospital stay, he turned out to be an inquisitive cat with a lovely personality; he helped other animal patients, often dogs, by snuggling up to them and befriending them. He was also a comfort to human visitors when they were feeling sad or distressed.



By early 2015, it was reported that his recovery was almost complete, and his family could look forward to welcoming him to his rebuilt home, but there was still some way to go. and I think it

finally happened in August. In 2022 he was reported as being back at the hospital a couple of times for some infection to be treated, but was otherwise doing well..



[ABC News](#) (Feb. 2015) | [Huffington Post](#) (May 2015) | [iheartcats](#) (Aug. 2021) | [The Dodo](#) (May 2015)

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Arthur (2025)

Worcester, England



With burns to his head and face, tabby cat **Arthur**, as he was named, was rushed to an emergency overnight vet when he was found by a member of the public during April 2025. It wasn't known how he'd come by the burns, and he wasn't microchipped, so no owner could be traced.

After treatment for his burns Arthur was taken to the local RSPCA shelter and was put up for rehoming. His story was seen on social media by Barry and Tracy Salkin, who decided to take him in to join their other cat Lucy. So in June, he went to his new home, where Tracy described him as 'confident, very sweet and with just a little bit of cat-titude'. He had a nice large window from which to look out on the world, and his own sofa bed. He recovered well from his ordeal, so it was a story with a happy ending!

[BBC News](#) (June 2025) | [Birmingham Mail](#) (May 2025)

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