



City Critters, Inc.

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Winter 1998/99

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

The 1998 Kitten Season newsletter is so late that kitten season's over already, along with the rest of the year! Not that we've run out of cats or kittens, but we are running out of funds.

City Critters, Inc. is just finishing its fifth year as a not-for-profit doing local, grassroots feline rescue and adoption work in NYC. CCI was founded in 1994 by a few people with full-time jobs, families and other big personal obligations, who had been struggling to rescue and place strays in their own back yards. After a couple of years of friendly collaboration we decided to incorporate, thinking this way we could do our small share better, and survive it too, remaining sane and solvent. Easier said than done.

1998 was tough on every level. There was simply more gain, more loss, overwhelmingly more of almost everything except good adoptive homes, which have been much harder to find. So our emphasis now has to be on the animals we need to place because there certainly have been more of them—the '98 kitten season started early, ended late, and flooded our local adoption services with kittens. Over the last year we have networked to help many more than our previous average of 500 cats a year, quite a few dogs and some other critters.

Where do City Critters cats come from?

Sources remain the same: rescued local stray and abandoned cats, cats whose owners can't or won't keep them, cats from the Center for Animal Care & Control who require special handling for simple problems (like colds, pregnancy, maternity, youth, old age, nervousness) that make them unadoptable by CACC. And a new source: our own cats, returned from earlier adopters (because we really do take them back).

Help we need now

Our needs are simple: we need good homes for cats (especially shy and older ones, as we do not believe in destroying healthy or reparable animals), and we need money to pay our huge bills. On our small but significant scale we rescue, vet, foster and adopt out abandoned animals at inconceivably high cost (even after generous price discounts). We also need a small office space, volunteers (foster homes, transporters of cats and stuff), cat supplies, good advice, more places to show cats for adoption.

Notes on the Year of the Tiger

From the point of view of City Critters' core members who still see our project as the work of a few like-minded colleagues, the only event of the year was the sudden death of our dear friend, most dependable member, and stellar treasurer, Bonnie Fitzsimmons. Bonnie died unexpectedly of a stroke at age 56, at home, in the middle of a typically busy Saturday dedicated to hard work on behalf of both animals and people. She left friends and family bereft and stunned, her own cats homeless, and countless acts of kindness undone, acts that could only have been done by her. Bonnie can't be replaced, and we all miss her more than we can say.

In terms of the fulfillment of our "mission," 1998 was critical. In January we filed papers with the IRS to continue our status as a 501(c)(3) charity and were approved. We received more press coverage than usual (we usually avoid publicity, having found it leads to more donations of cats than of money or homes). Our work was mentioned in *The Advocate*, published by the American Humane Association, and our adoptions were publicized in Elizabeth Hess's 10/19/98 *New York Magazine* cover story on the CACC. In November, thanks to the careful planning and hard work of Liz Farber, our first annual benefit dinner at the Fire Museum in Soho was a tremendous success. About 200 people had a conspicuously great time, enjoying good company, food, drink, jazz.



Bonnie Fitzsimmons

Elizabeth Hess delivered a warm keynote speech. Many of Bonnie's friends who attended heard Judge Bernard Fried pay a poignant tribute to her, and the first Bonnie Fitzsimmons Humane Award was presented to Ada Leon, a compassionate downtown cat rescue worker who has saved hundreds of strays and placed many through our network. This fundraiser helped us realize that City Critters is much more and much stronger than the few people who started it.

Aside from the usual cat-by-cat workload, there were some big challenges. In February, we got 34 cats who had been sent to the CACC in a landlord-tenant dispute. The placement of these huge, sweet, handsome creatures ("Dexter" is shown to the right) took the whole year to complete. We are especially grateful for the kind help of Evelyn Cole, who donated an apartment as a holding space for months, Gramercy Park Animal Hospital, where many cats were vetted, and Judy Kappel, who cared for them daily with devotion.

In April, Marilyn Spierer together with Nancy Collins, Richard Heyman and David Jacobs, began full-force the rescue and relocation of some 20 neglected cats from the home of a failing elderly woman in Bedford Stuyvesant, plus a couple of stray dogs outside. This project, referred to us by a social worker, continued through the end of the year. Many thanks to Dr. Patrick Cotter and his heroic staff for their help! Some of these beautiful shy cats still need homes.

While in Bed-Stuy, our efforts came to the attention of Kimberly and Ernel, who had been trying to rescue and place numerous friendly strays there. The neighborhood is particularly hazardous to cats and kittens due to the prevalence of trained fighting dogs. So we returned to Brooklyn, and with the assistance of Doris Kieser and her Subaru wagon (which holds lots of kittens, cats and "stuff"), seventeen of the sweetest cats and one gentle giant of a dog were rescued. Thanks to Lefferts Animal Hospital in Queens and to Midtown Animal Hospital for their help in salvaging these animals.

When Bonnie died in June, she had 11 cats of her own and 6 fostered kittens in her large, bright and airy apartment. All had to be removed on the spot before her apartment was sealed, or they would have been sent to CACC or locked inside. Thanks to Bonnie's friends, West Chelsea Veterinary Hospital, Tribeca-Soho Animal Hospital, The Barking Zoo, Anise Baron, Carolyn Miller, foster parents Steven, Alessandra and Bruce, and some kind and compassionate adopters, all were placed, finally, by early January 1999.

And in December—just before Christmas—we got 48 more cats, Ada's rescued strays from the Chinatown area, who lost their lease on a little downtown animal shelter and are now in holding patterns in various places around Manhattan and Queens. Thanks to the coordination of Mary Tufts, emergency assistance by Downtown Veterinary Clinic, financial support from Ahimsa Foundation and United Action for Animals, the generosity of Eileen Poole and Liz Kaul, who have lent a room for some of them, none had to be sent to CACC or euthanized. But Ada's cats need further costly vet care, board and special adopters, because Ada picked up only the neediest animals—like André, a Henry Street stray who had been burnt in a restaurant fire and left out on the sidewalk to fend for himself, or Sammy, who had suffered severe internal injuries, probably from being hit by a car, and needed two major surgeries to completely recover. We will be working with Ada's cats for a long time.



Multi-cat challenges are causing the original Critters to grow older and poorer faster, and we were not so young or rich to begin with. Throughout the year we continued to place cats we acquired in multi-cat rescues of previous years, like handsome Fred (shown left), one of a large colony living in a Chelsea lumberyard that shut down in late '97.

But meanwhile, we also enjoyed many “good saves,” the kind of work that keeps us going, like:

JJ the Cat, rescued last New Year’s Eve, a friendly, old, neutered, hyperthyroid brown tiger cat shivering in an empty metal cabinet in a Chinatown courtyard at 20°F

Woody and Nutty, a pair of kittens playing hide and seek in a Chinatown park treetop on a warm winter night (lured to lower branches by a trail of tuna oil!)



China, happily adopted

Four small red kittens huddled together in sleet in Columbus Park as the temperature plunged (“learning about weather,” said the park attendant)

BonBon, a red tabby baby imprisoned under a milk crate beneath a bramble bush (why?)—and **Onyx**, a tiny black kitten living in a rathole nearby

Six sickly kittens rescued from a Baxter Street alley just before poison was put down

China, a sweet, pretty, young female tabby found with all four feet trussed, suspended between the two rear tires of a parked car on Worth Street and saved by a kind woman on her lunch hour who heard the cat’s cries and rescued her with the help of others who passed by

Yeti, found by following his screams: he was pinned by one leg under a heavy metal plate in a Hester Street backyard in freezing weather, and his feral brother **Cheerio**, caught two days later, dehydrated, eyes glued shut from an eye infection, but adopted out a week later in great health, fully socialized

Adorable **Alfredo**, starving equally for food and friendship in a Hester Street basement, and his shy sister **Tinta** who still needs a home

Spicy **Mehitabel**, nabbed while scavenging upside down in a trash can

Elegant **Petra**, young black female living in an underground vault beneath an empty lot on William Street

Omar, black male hearthrob, already neutered, hiding under construction activity in the basement of what is now United Artists Theatre at 13th St. and Broadway

Grace, the White Rabbit, “given” to elderly Mr. Yu, who lost her in a community garden; found and fostered by a local Critter (see right), spayed, and adopted by Max and his friendly male rabbit Amadeus.

Flora, sweet longhaired pregnant female hunkered under a squalid, rat-infested stoop on Forsyth Street

George, gray tabby cutie rescued by Patti and Rich Brotman down in Battery Park City as part of City Critters’ “pest control” contract with BPC Authority

Tofutti the Tortoiseshell, rescued from scaffolding around a Gramercy Park highrise, and **Ollie**, rescued from scaffolding around Chelsea’s London Terrace, re-rescued from the CACC where he was deemed unadoptable, then twice re-rescued from the ceiling of his foster home. (It’s not easy being rescued.)



Grace and Tigger (“Mr. Mom”)



Sabu the Dog

Sabu the Dog, scrappy, lovable young terrier mix rescued under the Williamsburg Bridge and now living in the Gramercy Park area

And from the Department of Special Thanks

We have so many credits we can’t begin to list them all. Nevertheless, special thanks to our vets and their staffs, to the pet supply stores that help us adopt out animals (both Barking Zoos and The Pet Bar), to the volunteers who shoulder so much hard work, other small local grassroots groups and good samaritans who struggle to help strays as best they can, members of the community who support what we do. Thanks to Ahimsa Foundation, the Anne Beverly McCormack Foundation, and United Action for Animals Grateful Paws Program for continued support. As always, with all the help we have, we still need more!

Please help us place these great cats...

Lionel

Rescued from the F Train stop at Houston and 1st Streets where he had been pacing the rails for a week, yowling at rush hour passengers. Animal welfare agencies had been called and declined involvement. A City Critters volunteer agreed to go if assisted by transit police, who were sent to the scene by the MTA. Lionel was rescued in under 3 minutes, because he was starving and friendly, just frightened. The hardest part was getting the rescuer back up on the platform. The passengers delivered a standing ovation (most were already standing of course), and the cat was taxied to the vet. Lionel is FIV positive, so he has to be a single cat or with another FIV positive. He loves cats and people—he dances on his hind legs to be petted (3–5 years old, neutered).



Mirabelle

One of the Critters has the habit of strolling around Chinatown in the early morning hours, just to see what happens. One night in August, she peeked behind a construction wall at Mott Street and Canal and saw a tiny gray mom cat with huge eyes nursing three adorable gray tiger kittens, also with huge eyes. That night she caught one kitten, the next night the other two kittens, and finally, Mirabelle the Excellent Mom. The kittens were placed immediately. Mirabelle's gorgeous—all fixed up, although still a bit mixed up (slightly fierce in her public relations). She votes NO to cats, YES to food and ratty toys, MAYBE to people. Rodents beware! (1 year old, spayed)



Katya the Paper Bag Kitty

Stunning tabby and white female (right) found in a sack near a Chinatown church, clearly abused. Katya's doing much better now, but still needs a special owner with cat experience to give her confidence, preferably as a single kitty. Katya's affectionate and playful, but needs help getting over her terrors. (2 years old, spayed)



Dylan

One of a family of seven cats rescued from an Orchard Street backyard in late 1997. Dylan was shy for months, but now is a mischievous character who loves people and is crazy about cats. His black and white brother Derek is also still looking for a home. (About a year old, neutered)

White Squirrel (not shown: Witness Protection Program)

Spirited white monkey cat, born a Bronx backyard stray and rescued at the request of the people who fed his extended family. He lost his right eye to an infection at about 6 weeks of age, but don't feel sorry for him: he sees more with one eye than most cats do with two. Squirrel is busy: likes to climb, explore, be mischievous. He's strong-willed, but very sensitive, intelligent, and affectionate, has a sense of humor, is more accurate than an alarm clock, playing both percussion and stringed instruments at 5:58 a.m. Likes cats in reasonable numbers. (3 years old, neutered)