



Paul Azevedo

## The Reactor

### Confessions of a Cat Lover

As anyone who knows me will tell you, I don't qualify as a born cat lover. I grew up without ever having a cat. What's more, I never missed it. I never felt left out.

A cat was a pet that other people kept. Cats were creatures who came into my yard and pestered the birds I was trying to encourage. Cats were the creatures who yowled on neighbor's fences.

Dogs, on the other hand, are my kind of animal. You can teach a dog to heel, or sit, or come at your command. Try and do that with a cat. Just try.

Dogs will retrieve sticks, or herd cattle, or protect sheep from predators. You'll never see a cat point a covey of birds for a hunter, or sniff out dope at the airport.

I guess I was compromised five or six years ago when it came to cats. A beautiful Russian Blue cat, well fed and insouciant, moved into the Tribune. This creature came in the open door one day. She was promptly put out. She came in another door. She was put out again. About the third time around, somebody fed her. Then somebody named her Cynthia, and we were hooked. Of course, we advertised, but no one showed up to claim her, so she stayed. Her owner finally showed up months later, but decided that her Cindy (for Cinderella) had become a newspaper cat. So the cat stayed. I have never fed her. I figure that's the best favor I can do her, since everybody else feeds her. She insists. But I resist.

She sleeps in shoe boxes, or on the front counter, or on the boss' desk, or on empty chairs, or in crannies or nooks, or in open desk drawers.

Once she got locked in a cabinet for a few hours by mistake. She climbed in to sleep and somebody closed the door. She was furious.

But even Cynthia did not convert me, until the day my wife took my younger daughter up to Amador County to visit a friend. The friend raises Guide dogs for the blind. Guide dogs are great for blind people but hell on cats.

Naturally when my daughter discovered a pair of two week old kittens in the woodpile, their ribs sticking out, she couldn't leave the frail creatures to the mercies of the dogs.

Which is why two kittens showed up in my garage with a "Please, daddy, can we, huh??" Of course I gave in. I figured they wouldn't live long, so what the heck?

Herbie and Johnny are now almost three years old. Herbie is the one with the lion mane. Johnny, who was voted most likely to die at three weeks, is still the smaller of the two, at about 10 vigorous pounds. These creatures have only three states of being. Either they are asleep, which is often, or they are walking along quite deliberately, which sometimes happens, or they zoom from one place to another. Open the door and they scoot out before they can be stopped. Five minutes later they are at the window, complaining about being kept out.

Perhaps you can explain to me how, after living almost fifty years without having pets in my house (my dogs have always lived outside) I allow these creatures to chase each other all over my furniture, boss me around, sleep on my lap, and in general, take over.