



BLACK CATS

By Carole Stevens Bibisi

Through metal bars I sit and stare, I've been here for over a year.
I sit in the corner on a mat; that's because I'm nobody's cat.
My name is Bronte, pronounced Bronty, I'm black and beautiful (no pedigree)
but I'm a cool cat, don't you agree; and isn't America the land of the free?

I'm a shelter cat; I got dumped in a park, I was lucky to be found in the pitch dark.
The humans who rescued me are kind, but I just don't like being confined.
I'm confused, and feeling very sad; someone said black cats are bad?
I look around; can't help but see there's mostly black cats here; like me.

Is it about color? Have we done wrong? Is this why we've been here so long?
I'm popular, yeah, on Halloween night, me and the witch, to give you a fright?
Humans are hard to understand, do some of them live in voodoo-land?
The color of *their* hair, do I care; or even notice if there's none there?

I played in my cage and meowed hello. Over here humans, don't you know
that I'm purrfect and very clever? Adopt me; I'll be your friend forever!
But they pass me by when they see I'm black. Stop, take me home. Come back!
They didn't smile or give *me* a pat; said they didn't want a bad luck cat.

In some countries the opposite is true; I bring extreme good luck for you.
Is superstition and prejudice, what's really behind all of this?
Ruled by ignorance and fear, in the seventeen hundreds, or near,
history tells us that a Pope decreed, black cats and dogs they did not need.

Black is evil they preached and drilled, belonging to Satan, and must be killed.
Is that why friends would disappear, one day here, the next, not there?
They weren't adopted I surmised, is that what it means to be 'euthanized'?
A home and family I'll never know, if *I'm* the next on death row.

But today a miracle happened for me, in the form of humans, Carole and Lee,
With a sleek black cat like me in mind, they came to rescue and to find,
"Oh look she's lovely, the best by far, a magical, Le Chat Noir!"
Wow, was I hearing that right? I purred with love and sheer delight.

I couldn't believe it was me they picked. You really want me? I'm not being tricked?
They held me close and I snuggled back. Meow! They *loved* that I was black!
They thanked the shelter then took me away. It certainly was a happy day.
I found a home! I'm no longer sad. I finally found a Mom and Dad.

There *are* humans who understand, who don't live in voodoo land!
No evil suspicions that control and nag. They think outside the paper bag!
Unconditional love, hey that's wow; deserves another me-ow!
Four paws up to them I say, kudos to the black cat devotee!

I fancy myself as a fine bit of fur; a proud black cat, a panther.
NOT a witches' cat for Halloween fright, a source of ridicule hate and spite.
Black cats bring good luck you know, like a horseshoe or a rainbow;
so don't believe a hateful decree, adopt a lucky black cat like me!

Have you rescued an animal yet? Please make a home for a shelter pet.
Save my friends and your love we'll repay, so volunteer and adopt today.

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Is it bad luck for a black cat to cross your path? No way! In fact it's good luck according to artist, musician, and poet **Carole Stevens Bibisi**, a native New Zealander and the author/illustrator of 'Tails' of American Bronte. She wrote a children's/cat lovers' book from the perspective of her cat Miss Bronte, a black cat she adopted from a shelter eight years ago. She's now working on a second book, Bronte's Alphabet. While living in Australia, Carole had fallen in love with a sleek black cat with a long tail when she minded her friend's cat named Bronte when her friend went to Italy for a year. She was so inspired by Aussie Bronte that after moving to America in 2002 she adopted a look-alike black cat she dubbed American Bronte. Carole, a professional singer, studied art, design,

and lettering in college in New Zealand and worked in the commercial art and advertising field. When she moved to the United States, she focused completely on art. But it was her volunteer work in animal shelters that motivated her to write the book on American Bronte, and of course the inspirational Miss Bronte

herself! Be sure to check out Carole's Cats (you'll find more than just black cats) on her website www.artharmonycreations.com. Signed copies of 'Tails' of American Bronte are available from Carole personally or unsigned from Amazon.com.



Unlikely Healer Walks on Three Paws

By Cathy Conheim

Half a decade ago, in a little mountain town about 60 miles northeast of San Diego, a feral kitten dragged his front left leg uselessly. The dog-loving owners of the property in Julian where he sought refuge rushed him to the local veterinarian, who informed them that if his leg was amputated, he could live as an indoor cat. Gazing at me, a psychotherapist raised to hate cats because they ate birds, and at Donna Brooks, a retired physician and sculptor who had never had a cat, but always reached out to heal anyone who was hurting, the kitten eyed us hopefully. Would we help?

Two years later and several continents away, a woman was grieving the death of her son. Once gregarious and outgoing, Nancy withdrew from her family and friends, from everyone except her pet cats. What she had lost became far more important than what she still possessed. The little three-legged cat and Nancy connected, despite the oceans and differences between them, in an unlikely turn of events.

Like most grand adventures, this one began with a choice. Donna and I, the staunchly dog-only people, decided to bring the kitten home with us to help him heal after the successful amputation of his leg. Henry jm – the jm stands for Just Me – struggled for weeks to teach his new owners that he was not a dog and did not wish to be treated like one. Although three-legged, the feisty feline was hardly handicapped. Rather, he was a handy cat, one who could escape from all cages; one who could rouse his humans from a deep sleep as he played with anything and everything they dared to leave on the kitchen counter; one who could even, despite all odds, teach dog-only hearts to open up and love the newest member of their family.

Patiently wiggling his way into the hearts of his owners was just the first step in an extraordinary journey for Henry. I sent an email to 20 friends describing Henry's escapades as a newly minted indoor cat. Soon people from South Africa to Japan heard about what was happening, and wrote to share their stories, their challenges, and their curiosity about what Henry was learning. I discovered that speaking through Henry, in his voice, gave me a freedom of expression I did not have in my standard therapeutic role, and Henry's voice became the easiest way to reach and teach humans.

Through daily letters and emails, Henry served as a healer for Nancy, providing a bridge back to living and engaging with her family and friends – and over the next six years, Henry received almost 50,000 letters from other humans and critters. Some are hurting and struggling to find meaning in their lives, others seeking loving friendship. Henry was named the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) Cat of the Year for 2010, and he has authored two critically acclaimed books. The books, which tell his story of perseverance and triumph, have helped tens of thousands, including the families of injured veterans learning to cope with their new realities. The books teach children tolerance and resilience. They have been translated into Spanish and one into Creole. Henry recently pioneered the development of the world's first emotional bandage, an Apple iPad app entitled, "Ouch! Emotional bandage," which conveys some of his very simple lessons:

- Hate is learned.
- You are not defined by what happens to you.
- Play the paw you are dealt.
- Just because you can't do everything doesn't give you permission to do nothing.
- Be the best You that you can be.
- Play to your strengths.
- Accept mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Connect with what and whom you care about.

These lessons are guidelines for living a healthy, tolerant, and fulfilled life and are the underpinnings of *Henry's World* and *What's the Matter with Henry?* Both books are accompanied by unique "Kibble for Thought, Homework for Humans" workbooks, which were written for people of all ages. The healing messages and challenges are for humans; the profits, above printing costs, go to help animals. Any animal group in the world can use these materials as fundraising tools.

Henry's sister, Dolly, a poodle living the perfect dog life, was minding her business as the sole pet of the family in our house when we decided to rescue Henry. Not consulted about adopting the kitten, nor part of the hours and hours each day spent answering the letters to Henry, Dolly initially felt left out and dejected. However, after seeing the positive impact Henry had on people's lives, Dolly decided she wanted to become involved in healing, as well.

Dolly told her story in the book *What About Me? I'm Here Too!* and her "Kibble for Thought" workbook. Dolly speaks to all of us who feel invisible at times. Dolly is everyone: looking good on the outside but hiding her confusing feelings on the inside. Her book validates difficult and conflicting feelings and gives a wider vocabulary to express those feelings, even when love must be shared.

Why have the voices of Henry and Dolly connected so powerfully with followers from hugely varied backgrounds around the world? Animals are our safe havens, an unending source of unconditional

love and acceptance. The National Institutes of Health acknowledges and researches the healing powers that animals exert on humans. No matter whether the animals are real, stuffed, or virtual, they become trusted confidants and helpers regardless of the challenges their humans are facing.

Whether the person is an injured Marine, a child who is different from others, a lonely challenged senior citizen, a curious child, an animal-loving human, Henry and Dolly provide listening, loving, caring examples of connection to others. The pair, along with Henry's two-legged Dachshund girlfriend Tink, teach humans by example to be curious, to learn the skills of resilience, and to focus on what they have, not on what they lack. They help people express their emotions, and, in the process, reveal their true selves to those around them.

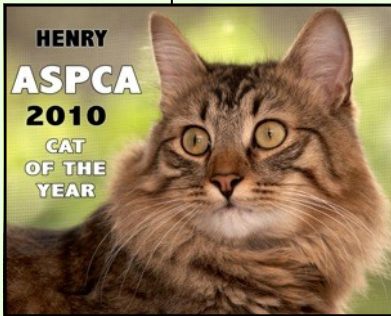
The Just Me Project™, the educational and healing arm of Henry's World, provides education and healing to people of all ages and backgrounds. Adaptable and engaging, the project has been used in schools, on military bases, and in a number of hospitals and clinics. One group teaches tolerance and anti-bullying through Henry's story. Another school utilizes it to evoke creativity from children who come from deeply disadvantaged backgrounds.

In Henry's hometown, Julian Elementary School was one of only thirteen in the nation to win a 2010 National School of Character award for promoting character education using the Just Me Project. The results have been dramatic. Detentions, particularly for bullying, have dropped; disadvantaged and learning disabled students have made huge academic gains; and attendance has increased.

Almost 50,000 copies of *What's the Matter with Henry?*, *Henry's World*, and *What About Me, I'm Here Too!* are in circulation. Over 6,000 books and workbooks have been distributed to families of sick children, military families, and children displaced by Hurricane Katrina and the earthquake in Haiti.

Like Henry, his girlfriend Tink also has defied expectations. Born with only two legs as a result of irresponsible breeding, Tink's spirit is irrepressible as she races about on a custom set of wheels. Successfully constructed after eleven tries by orthotist Adrian Ravitz, the wheels fit perfectly and illustrate Henry's point that mistakes are learning opportunities. Tink sometimes accompanies me on trips and speaking engagements, serving as a tangible example of how a positive attitude and curiosity can result in success, against all the odds. People who meet Tink quickly get the message that no one needs to be defined by circumstances when Tink races toward them.

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The Cat's MEOW

Turn Our Mourning Into Dancing

By MEOW Editor Karen Payne

This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalms 118:24, KJV)

Never has it seemed so important to me to be thankful for what is good in life; that's because life has never seemed so precarious.

In our last issue, I celebrated the laughter and good times I've shared with my mother. As often happens when we think we've learned a life lesson, a test came immediately. My mother, Maye, was diagnosed with breast cancer, and despite her age, a well-kept secret, she had to endure painful surgery and now faces radiation treatments. Thankfully, the cancer had not spread, so her doctors expect her to recover.

In my last column, considering the attributes my mom shares with my cats, I forgot an important one – their claim to have nine lives. During her ordeal, Mama took comfort in the hope that she must have a few lives left. She loved the fragrant flowers that many friends showered on their "Daisy Maisie," deliberately focusing on their beauty and her friends' kindness rather than on the fact that cancer had come calling and proved to be a more objectionable guest than familiar old "Arthur," who has brought arthritis pain for many years.

These past weeks have been a time of reckoning for my mother and for me. Bernadette Kazmarski's brilliant article in the spring issue of *Meow* about her cat, Peaches, who helped prepare her for her mother's final illness, struck a deep chord in my heart. Now, I, too, want to treasure every moment and accept that all people,

all cats, all creatures – all of us mature and eventually will die and be transformed.

Right after her surgery, Mama persuaded me to attend a *tour de force* by the brilliant young pianist Adam Golka, who performed all five piano concertos of Ludwig van Beethoven, my favorite composer since childhood, in two nights. During those magical hours, I was truly at peace and in heaven. I'm so grateful that my mother pushed me to be there; it was a genuine gift of love from her.

And so it is – while life goes on, we are called to give our love and compassion wherever we can. In Texas, I rescued an abandoned cat family dubbed the "Awesome Pawsomes" by foster mom Judith Abernathy (mom cat Duchess and kitten Duke are Hemingway cats, while kittens Dulcinea and Dabi have regular paws). Judith works with the Humane Society of West Texas' purrific fostering program. Also at my behest, just hours before the elderly owner of a gorgeous Himalayan was admitted to hospital, Judith took in his beloved Miss Kitty. Judith's son has a fabulous website with elegant cat T-shirts; see them at www.DiosElGato.com.

Back in Miami after two months' absence, I'm searching for good homes for two darling kittens and four adult kitties found by neighbors – all of them in need of a helping paw.

Sadly, beautiful Bella – my friend Annette Perpignano's splendid 7-year-old Ragdoll baby – died just two days ago, without warning, from a rare ailment known as chylothorax. We mourn her loss. For me, the strangeness of it intensified my feeling that life is precious – and alarmingly precarious as well.

For now, I'm praying for a respite until I can return to my mother's side and, with God's grace, continue our adventure of looking for laughter, even when it seems impossible. I'm thankful that I can still cherish that hope. ♥



← Maye at a Lubbock Women's Club event, August 2011

Unlikely Healer (continued from previous page)

Our nation struggles with a medical system focused on disease, not on health, and on procedures, not on caring. Henry, Dolly, and Tink show us that if we focus on love and acceptance, we can help each other and ourselves in ways we cannot predict and in ways that unite us all in healing our hearts.

For more information: www.henryworld.org. ♥

Cathy Conheim, L.C.S.W., a psychotherapist in private practice for more than 30 years, is the head of FOCUS, a personal and organizational consulting firm, and the Athena Foundation. She sees herself as an agent for change. Along with women's health, dogs were her passion – until a cat crept into the picture. Cathy is a prize-winning author and co-founder of the Just Me Project™, the non-profit paw of Henry's World under the Athena Foundation. She's also the creator of the Real Women Project (realwomenproject.org).

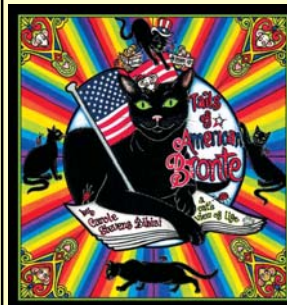


ADOPT A BLACK CAT!

Here are just a few of the many reasons to adopt a black cat:

- Black is beautiful.
- Black goes with everything.
- Black matches any decor.
- You can't lose black cats in the snow!
- Black cats bring good luck and are very affectionate, loving, and fun.
- Love knows no color.

The No. 1 reason to adopt a black cat is that they are the least likely to get adopted in this country.



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