

*For Loki and Sif,
you make my life full*

*And for all the cats waiting for a forever
home, you are loved*



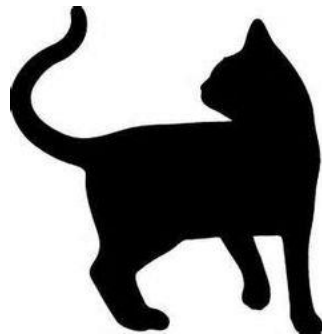
**Memoirs of
A
Crazy Cat Lady**

By Becca Anglesey

∞ Catspaw Press ∞

What's in Here and Where to Find It

Author's Statement.....5
Bitsy and the Birth of a Crazy Cat Lady.....8
Jinxed.....14
A Mystic Connection.....22
My Cat Sucks.....36
Colophon.....42
Author Biography.....43





A Note from the Author

My name is Becca Anglesey and I decided to call my chapbook *Memoires of A Crazy Cat Lady*. I found that I was very deeply affected by the writing and instruction of Chris Frizzelle, who taught us during class about writing creative non-fiction. I had almost always done fictional creative writing in the past and I thought of non-fiction as being dry, boring books about the civil war that you would find on clearance at Barnes and Noble, but Frizzelle's work was neither dry nor boring. I took that as a challenge to push myself as a writer and fill my chapbook with non-fiction works.

Still, I needed to find a subject that I could write about that was interesting. I had a very uneventful white middle class upbringing. What could I possibly say that hasn't been said before by people who are more talented than I am? While I thought about this, my cat, Loki, decided that he wanted to cuddle with me, even though I had a computer on my lap. It was then that I realized that I needed to write about my cats. Not just my current cats, Loki and Sif, but about the cats I have had throughout the course of my life, and

even a few that weren't mine, but still made a lasting impression.

Everyone has always joked that I was going to grow up to be a crazy cat lady, so I decided to examine the experiences and interactions I had with cats throughout my life, what lessons they taught me, and how they shaped me into the person that I am today. Bisty taught me about responsible pet ownership and safe sex; Jinx taught me to have compassion and empathy for all living creatures; Mystic taught me about friendship and how to let go of what you love; Dragon was a lesson in loving something the way it needs to be loved; Loki taught me that I am worthy of unconditional, irrational, fierce love. I have always wanted to immortalize my cats in some way and this seemed to be the perfect venue to do it. They all had such different and pronounced personalities that deserve to be remembered.

One thing that I have had a difficult time with in my writing is that I tend to use language that isn't consistent with the average vocabulary. When I write, I tend to use the words that I use in my everyday speech, but I like to use big or unusual words. Unfortunately, sometimes it can come off as feeling overwrought or snooty, like I'm trying to "sound like a writer", but that isn't the case. I have had a challenge finding the right place between accessible and natural while still being true to my own voice. I want people to read things

the way I intend them to be read, so the editing process for this chapbook was very meticulously thought through.

As mentioned before, I drew a lot of inspiration from the writing of Chris Frizzelle, but I should also mention that I was intrigued by Joan Fiset as well. I appreciated how her book was made up of snapshots of her childhood to reflect on her relationship with her father. Her book inspired me to write a memoir style book made up of vignettes. For the purposes of this assignment, I wasn't able to include all the works I have planned. I am hoping to continue working on this project in the near future.

So, with that I hope that this work will, at the very least, put a smile on your face. Grab a blanket, a cup of hot tea, and a furry companion and wander through the recollections of a crazy cat lady.



Bitsy and the Birth of a Crazy Cat Lady

We got Bitsy when I was four or five years old, a cardboard box kitten. Free to a good home... *were* we a good home? I think Bitsy was merely a symbol of my parent's desire for middle class respectability in a new town. Taking the kitten was a declaration to everyone that we were a good home.

My sister and I came up with her name because she was such a small kitten. Cream colored fuzz with grey tipped ears, faint grey stripes along her soon-to-be agile body, and piercing ice blue eyes. Her proper name was Bitsy Blue-Eyes, though she never had a tag or collar. She was allowed to roam the neighborhood, a cat of both indoor and outdoor worlds with no protection from the dangers of either.

Everyone loved Bitsy. She was such an easy cat to love. Even our dog, Kewpie, adored her. Bitsy and Kewpie had set aside the age-old war between dog and cat, forging a bond

out of mutual cuteness and respect. They would often lie curled up together in front of the living room stove. Yes, Bitsy was loved by many... and I mean that in the most literal sense because apparently Bitsy was the hottest pussy in town.

From the time of her first heat, Bitsy was constantly pregnant. Every time she would have a litter, my parents would take her to the nearest veterinarian to have her spayed only to be told that she was once again in a family way. This annoyed my dad to no end, but to me it was pure magic. Because of Bitsy almost all my formative years were filled with kittens. Gobs of kittens! Oodles of kittens! It was fantastic. One day we would wake up, and poof! There was Bitsy nursing a litter of fuzzy jelly beans and looking quite pleased with herself.

My mom told me that I had to leave the kittens alone because Bitsy might abandon them if we handled them too much. I found this nearly impossible to obey. The kittens were like crack to me. How could I stay away? I can recall many a happy afternoon sitting at the base of the stairs, Bitsy's favorite kitten nesting place. My sister and I would gently pet the downy, folded ears of the freshly born cats. We would spend hours watching them learn to walk and listening to their squeaky croaky meows. This play would evolve into

teasing them with bits of string, chasing balls, and the pure happiness that came with a kitten purring in the hollow of my neck.

Then came weaning. Bitsy would turn the kittens away as they came to nurse, and the kittens were left to fend for themselves using only the skills she had taught them, or at the very least they had to find the cat food bowls on their own. It's a cruel world. My dad became very aware of the kittens during weaning time because that meant that he could get rid of them. My dad wasn't much of a cat person at all—he was simply overruled by my mom most of the time. But in this he was firm; once the kittens could eat solid food they had to go!

For every litter of kittens, the drill was always the same: get a big cardboard box, put the kittens in the box, have a baggie of free food for every kitten to sweeten the deal, sit outside the local grocery store, hawk kittens to every passerby. It was devastatingly hard the first few times. They were *my* kittens! I didn't understand why we couldn't just keep them. But eventually I saw how happy the kittens made the people we gave them away to, so I couldn't be that sad about it anymore. Sure, I hated to part with them, but I knew that Bitsy would have another litter in a few months.

When I was eight, Bitsy had her last litter of kittens. There were twelve in that litter, ranging from pure black to calico. There was one kitten in particular, a little grey tabby, who was born without a back foot. Well, he *had* the foot, it was only just attached by the barest trace of skin. This was a very important distinction to me. My parents knew right away something was wrong, but they didn't tell me. I loved that spunky three-legged kitten. I would look forward to seeing him every day when I got home from school.

Then one day, I came home and he wasn't with the other kittens. I looked everywhere a one-week old kitten could possibly be, but he wasn't anywhere. I asked my mom if she had seen the three-legged kitten. She told me that she had taken him to the vet and had him put to sleep. She said that he was sick and would never be able to survive. She couldn't look at me when she said it. I was crushed. She had waited until I had left for school that day to euthanize him—I didn't even get to say goodbye. I think that was the moment I stopped trusting my mom. She was right, of course, but I didn't know it at the time.

Over the next few days, the kittens began to get sick. I was too young to notice, so when my dad woke me up one morning to tell me that all the kittens had died in the night I

was completely caught off guard. I couldn't believe it was true until we were all in the backyard, burying them in a hole my dad dug near the fence. He had placed the eleven remaining kittens in a gallon sized Ziploc bag. I could see each and every one of them through the clear plastic, unmoving, as if they were asleep, but weirdly squished together to fit inside the bag. I started to cry. I can still point out the place in my backyard where that piece of my childhood is buried.

The end came quickly for Bitsy after that. A week later my dad came to my school to pick up my sister and me early. We were very confused. Neither of us had a doctor's appointment, which was the only reason my parents would ever take us out of school early, and that almost never happened with the two of us together. He drove us to the vet's office, which I knew couldn't mean anything good. We almost never took our pets to the vet because it was too expensive, but there was mom, waiting in the lobby with Bitsy in the ratty cat carrier we bought at a thrift store.

We were shown into a white room with a stainless-steel table. My mom put Bitsy on the table. I remember her laying on it. She was very still. The vet told us that Bitsy had both Feline Leukemia and Feline HIV. I didn't know that cats could get either of those things. I later learned that she had contracted

both due to her sexual promiscuity, which left an imprint of it's own on my maturing psyche.

My dad told us to say goodbye to Bitsy. I gave her a pet on the head and I told her that I hoped she would feel better. The vet picked her up off the table and took her somewhere in the back. The table was covered in an unnatural quantity of Bitsy's fur, cream chunks against the brushed metal. I never saw Bitsy again.



Jinx was the only pet I ever had that was older than me. My parents eloped in the Autumn of 1983. They got married in a courthouse with only a secretary as a witness. They only have one picture from their wedding day—in it my mom and dad are standing side by side, beaming with the happiness of naive newlywed bliss, and in my mom's arms is a tiny black and white shorthair kitten looking rather nonplused. That was Jinx. I used to call her Wedding Cat.

Jinx was a cranky old bitch. For most people that was all they could see in her. She was antisocial, not much to look at, and she had bad manners for a cat. She used to poop everywhere but the litter box. Sometimes she would get in the litter box and poop right over the edge. I think she did it to purposefully piss off my dad. He would completely lose his temper whenever Jinx pooped outside her box

and Jinx was not so gently banished from the house for the next several hours.

Everyone thought that Jinx was just a mean spirited old cat, and maybe she was, but no one ever really thought of the events of her life that made her that way. She started out life as many cats do—as a gift. She was a token of love, a symbol of my parent's marriage. Shortly after their wedding they found out that they were expecting my older sister. They took Jinx to the vet to have her spayed, and they also made the regrettable decision to have Jinx declawed as well. I wonder if the vet was having a special deal on declawing, like a two for one thing.

My mom is a great animal lover, and I know that she would never have purposefully hurt Jinx, but I am absolutely certain that declawing Jinx started her on a path of lifelong frustration and irritability. I understand that it was the '80s and that it was fashionable to declaw your cats and that my parents were nervous to have a cat around a baby. When I was a child I was unsure what the full impact of declawing a cat was. When you have a cat declawed the vet has to cut off the bone that the claw grows out of. They literally cut the tip off the cat's fingers, taking a portion of the pad of the foot with it. It would

be like someone cutting a human finger off at the knuckle. That is the worst thing I can think of doing to a cat.

And so, poor Jinx was divested of her claws. But that isn't the end of this part of her story. The vet, in his infinite wisdom, put the medical tape covering her paws *directly on her fur*. When my mom went to remove the bandages, she ended up ripping out the fur on Jinx's paws! It was a traumatic experience for both woman and cat. Thirty-five years later my mom is still angry about it.

My parents had a very unstable life at that time. My dad had a hard time finding work and they had to move often so he could work on oil fields. My mom told me about a time that her, my dad, and my sister (who was an infant at the time) slept on a golf course. She tells it in a funny way, describing how they saw a family of skunks walk by, but to me it is a sad story. Everything they owned fit in the back of my dad's ratty old truck, including Jinx. The cab of the truck was only large enough for the humans. Jinx was placed in a cardboard box in the back of the truck, driving at freeway speeds, in good and bad weather, for more time than I like to think about.

By the time I came along two and a half years later, Jinx had already had a traumatic past. I had never known her to be anything but standoffish, and that was on a good day. But unlike the other members of my family who often cringed and complained at Jinx's bad-tempered yowling, I understood her. I never begrudged her for what she was, nor did I try to force her to be what she wasn't. Even from a young age, I knew that Jinx had had a hard life—you could see it in her eyes. They always looked slightly sad and weary.

Jinx did her best to make the best of a bad situation. She had no front claws, but she did still have her back claws. She would frequently hunt birds, rats, and squirrels using only her back claws. Talk about ingenuity! She would leave her kills for us to find on the electrical box outside the front door, as if placing an offering on a pedestal. It was a little gross, but it was her way of showing us affection.

There was one thing Jinx did better than anyone else in the world—Jinx gave the most incredible massages. When the mood struck her, she would jump up on my lap and she would start to knead on my legs. In a cat with claws, kneading can be really uncomfortable, but since Jinx had no front

claws it just felt wonderful. Sometimes she would lay across my back while I was taking a nap on the couch and knead while the soft vibration of her rare purrs penetrated my little body. Those were times when Jinx and I really bonded. Maybe she was trying to pass her kitty wisdom to me through osmosis. I was her chosen one, and I respected her in the way I was taught respect my elders.

Over the years the declawing began to catch up with Jinx. Claws are an important part of a cat's physical well-being. They use them to stretch their muscles and keep their backs aligned. Jinx couldn't do any of that. Over time, her spine began to get misshapen and she developed several suspicious lumps on her lower back. She was also terribly allergic to fleas and flea medicine. When the fleas would bite her, she would develop terrible welts, and there was very little anyone could do for her. All this contributed to Jinx's growing dissatisfaction.

Eventually my mom couldn't take seeing Jinx suffer anymore. I was eleven when we had Jinx put to sleep. She was thirteen, which isn't a bad run for a cat. Jinx had some type of cancer on her spine, and I wasn't terribly surprised when my mom told me it was time. But I was sad. I was so sad. I

hadn't had to deal with death much as a child and I didn't understand how to process my feelings of loss.

Our vet was very close to our house. My mom sat in the waiting room with Jinx on her lap. I sat next to her for a few minutes, but I just couldn't bear the waiting. Tears started to leak out of my eyes and they just wouldn't stop, because I knew that Jinx wasn't coming home with us. I turned to Jinx in my mom's lap and hugged her, right there in the waiting room. I wept into her coarse black fur, pouring out all the confused feelings running through my overfull heart. I said goodbye to Jinx right there in the lobby because I just couldn't wait anymore. I left the vet clinic and ran home, but not as fast as the tears ran down my cheeks.

My mom came home about an hour later, alone. She went to her bedroom and I didn't see her for the rest of the night. I now realize that she was deeply mourning Jinx, but she did so where I couldn't see. For an eleven-year-old girl, not seeing my mom grieve is the same thing as her not grieving at all. Everyone else in the house—my dad, older sister, and younger brother—all seemed fine. They just went along with the rest of their day. My dad seemed relieved. Without Jinx

there was one less pet in the house to worry about. My sister went to a friend's house. My little brother sat on the living room floor and played Banjo Kazooie on our Nintendo64.

Watching him play, I was filled with an irrational anger. Suddenly my tears were no longer of grief, but of rage. How was it that no one, **NO ONE**, else felt any grief over Jinxs' passing? How could they all be going about business as usual when the very fabric of our world had been forever altered? They all saw Jinx as a bother, a nuisance... a jinx. None of them ever had a real shred of empathy for a cat that had seen and experienced more hardship and torment than any cat should ever have to bear. Jinx held herself with more dignity and grace than any human would have given the circumstances of her life, and she still had it in her to show us affection we didn't deserve.

I stormed to my room and grabbed my Winnie the Pooh diary, furiously fumbling with the cheap plastic lock as righteous indignation surged through my tiny body. I was shaking with it. I grabbed my ball-point pen and began to write. For the next several hours I wrote. I wrote until my hand cramped, and then I kept writing. I chronicled Jinxs' life. I wrote about her quirks, her attitude,

and all the little things I loved so dearly about her. I wrote a tribute to a cat who raised me.

In a way, Jinx really was a mascot of my parent's marriage. Everything was wonderful and cute and happy when things were young and new. As Jinx began to deteriorate, so did their relationship. Jinx's passing ushered in a very dark period for my family. My dad had an affair when I was thirteen. Well, he was *caught* when I was thirteen. I can't really be sure how long it had been going on before that or if that was even the first time he had been unfaithful to my mom. I began to withdraw from interacting with my family more and more, and that gave me a new understanding of what Jinx knew. Trauma affects us all in profound ways, and sometimes the only way to deal with it is with withdrawal. I, like Jinx, became an observer instead of a participant in my family.

My parents decided to stay together because of my siblings and me, but their relationship was doomed to failure. Years later they got divorced anyway after my father had another affair. Wedding Cat was gone and she took the love with her.



A Mystic Connection

Perhaps the most meaningful and stable relationship I have ever had with a man was with a cat.

In the Spring just before I turned ten, a friend of mine who lived across the street announced that her cat was having kittens. It had been such a long time since I had held a kitten, so this news made me very excited. Even though they wouldn't be *my* kittens, I played with my neighbor often, so it would basically be the same thing as if they were. In fact, we playing together when the time finally came for the kittens to be born, and all the friends of my neighborhood gathered around to watch as they came into the world.

Soon enough, all the kittens were present and healthy. They squirmed, naked and blind, on a towel in my neighbor's shed, trying to find their way to their mother. It was wonderful to watch. Over the next few days my neighbor moved the kittens inside her

house. The kittens began to grow as kittens will, and I was over playing with them almost every day. I began to favor one kitten over all the others—a Siamese colored kitten with bright turquoise eyes. He was the only kitten in the litter with Siamese coloring. It fascinated me that a mutt cat could be so beautiful.

On the morning of my tenth birthday, I opened my front door to find my friend standing there, holding the kitten. She had even tied a cute red ribbon around him! I was so surprised I didn't know how to react. I looked back at my parents, but they were just smiling at me. They had already given their permission to my neighbor to give me the cat.

I squealed with happiness as I took the kitten out of my friend's arms. He was mine now. I had never had a pet before that was all *mine!* As a middle child in a working-class family I hardly had *anything* that was just mine. This was the best present I had ever gotten. I set him down on the living room floor and promptly named him Mystic because his eyes matched my favorite shade of cheap Walmart brand nail polish, proving once again that children really suck at naming pets.



Mystic and I were inseparable from that moment on. He was my cat and I was his girl. I fed and took care of him. We slept together. I told him my darkest little girl secrets. My dad didn't want a litter box in the house though, so Mystic also spent a lot of time outside. For the first two years of his life he was a bit wild. He spent the day while I

was at school outside, picking fights with other cats. One day he came home, and a huge chunk of his sable brown ear was gone! We decided to get him neutered, and he was much calmer after that. And his nuts were far less noticeable. Every time he would walk away from you they were all you could see! It was almost obscene, especially with pubescent children in the house. Getting him fixed was just better for everyone.

For years, Mystic was my best friend. There are times in adolescence that can be very dark. There was the period when my dad had an affair and my parent's marriage almost broke apart. My sister also did her best to antagonize everyone in our house; she bullied me relentlessly for my weight. Boys began paying attention to my friends, but not to me. I struggled a lot with depression and anxiety. Through all that, Mystic was there. That cat was like a port in the storm (my teenage-angst riddled storm). I would hold him at night while I cried, feeling like he was the only living thing in the world who cared if I were alive or dead. There were sometimes that he was my only lifeline... His calm, quiet support kept me from doing something I couldn't come back from.

And then there was a time when Mystic very literally saved my life (probably). I was laying out my clothes for school, which was rare for me, but I was feeling proactive. I even pulled out what shoes I was going to wear—a pair of those platform white sneakers made popular by The Spice Girls (you know the ones). I had just finished laying everything out when Mystic went berserk on one of my shoes! He stuck his head all the way in the shoe. I was confused because Mystic was always so calm and serene, and this behavior was entirely out of character. He liked to play as much as any other cat, but he had never gone after a shoe before, and a smelly one at that. I stared as he began to retract his head, holding the biggest, nastiest brown spider I had ever seen. My brain recognized it as a Brown Recluse, but before I could scream or do anything Mystic had eaten it! HE ATE THE SPIDER! I flipped out. I ran to my mom and told her the whole story, panicked that he might get poisoned from eating the spider. We watched him for signs that we should take him to the vet, but Mystic was fine. I would never have thought to check my shoe before putting it on... I would never have thought that there could be a deadly spider lurking there. I owed Mystic big time for that.

I began to grow up, but in my eyes, Mystic stayed the same. A dignified Siamese cat, gazing at me with his all-knowing eyes. I got married when I was 20 and I moved out of my parent's house. Our apartment wouldn't allow pets, so I had to leave Mystic behind. I only moved 5 minutes away, but it still hurt that he wouldn't be with me all the time. I think I went back to my parent's house more to visit my cat than to visit them.

My husband got deployed to Iraq, and I took the time he was gone to temporarily move to Portland to pursue a culinary degree. Again, I didn't take Mystic with me. It was only a temporary living arrangement. Besides, he would have had to become an indoor only cat and he would have gone nuts. That was what I told myself, anyway. In Portland, I was well and truly alone. No husband, no family, no friends... no Mystic. I drove the three hours back to my hometown almost every weekend because I was so lonely. I would pull up in front of my childhood home and Mystic would be waiting on the porch or in the front window. When he saw my car coming around the corner, he would run out to the sidewalk to greet me! This freaked me out a bit because I was afraid I would hit him, but I never did. It was a great comfort to me

to know he missed me as much as I missed him.

When my husband came home from his deployment, everything in my life changed. He suffered terribly from PTSD. I tried to get him to seek counseling, but he refused. We moved back near to our hometown in Washington, renting a house from one of my dad's co-workers. The idea was for him to find a job, but he didn't. He never even *tried* to find a job. Over the course of the next year and a half he became extremely verbally abusive. One night it escalated farther, and he pulled a loaded gun on me. I was so alone in that house. I had isolated myself from my friends and family as I sunk into a deep emotional fog. Sometimes I wish Mystic had been there as he had been when I was a teen, but overall, I think it was a good thing he wasn't. Who knows what my husband would have done to him.

As much as I tried to get my husband the help he needed, I realized that I needed to leave for my own safety. We got divorced and I moved back in with my parents. I felt so ashamed and embarrassed, as if the failure of my marriage had been entirely my fault. On top of all that, my parents were also on the brink of their own divorce. The anger and

unhappiness that filled the house I grew up in was made everything feel alien. I felt that the whole place could explode at any minute. The only thing that made this time of my life even remotely bearable was that I was reunited with Mystic. He welcomed me home as if I had never left. He would gently snuggle with me in the mornings under my blankets, his presence assuring me that everything would turn out alright.

The tension in my house became too much for me to handle. I began desperately searching for a job that would allow me to live on my own, but I could find nothing in my poverty-stricken town. I eventually had to move to Seattle with a friend and I found a job working for a catering company. Again, I had to leave Mystic behind because my new roommate had a cat who would not tolerate another cat in the apartment. Also, I was too poor to pay for the pet deposits. I wanted him with me, but I just couldn't see how to do it.

I worked all the time at that catering job. I had to—they were paying me poverty level wages and the only way I could support myself was to work an insane amount of overtime whenever I could. I also had split days off, which was just the worst. I was tired all the time and I had no time to have a life

outside of work. There were days where I would just come home from work and go straight to bed, or days in the summer where I worked so long that I never saw the sun. Before I knew it, two years had passed, and I had hardly gone back home for a visit.

One night, while I was cruising Facebook in my bed, my mom sent me a message saying that Mystic wasn't eating anymore. We knew that he had had issues with chronic gum infections and that he also had a heart murmur from a vet visit before I moved to Seattle. My mom told me that she was taking him into the vet the next morning to have him put to sleep and she thought I should know. I absolutely lost my mind. I freaked out at my mom, typing furiously that she HAD TO CANCEL the appointment. I was so panicked and angry that she would think that it was okay to have my cat put down and only giving me 12 hours' notice! It took about an hour, but I convinced her to put off the appointment for two days while I worked out how to get the day off work. I just *had* to be there. I couldn't let Mystic go through that alone. My boss wasn't happy, but she understood and gave me the day I requested.

I don't really remember the three-hour drive back to my mom's house. I think I was purposefully not thinking about what had to happen that day, desperately hoping that it wasn't real and that my mom was just overreacting. When I walked in the door, I saw that my mom was right. Mystic looked awful. He was too thin, his hair was falling out more than it should have been, and he smelled terrible. He didn't even have the pep to greet me the way he used to. He was just laying on the couch, but he looked at me as if to say *I'm so glad you came*. I went straight to him and gave him a gentle pet on the head while I opened his mouth to look inside. All his teeth were gone, his gums were terribly inflamed, and his breath was the worst it had ever been. The infection in his gums had obviously spread to his sinuses. His face was swollen, and his eyes and nose were goopy. He didn't even fight me as I put him in our old cat carrier, which he normally resisted with all his being.

My mom drove us to the vet, the same vet we had gone to since I was a small child. I had once volunteered at that office in high school when I thought I wanted to be a veterinarian myself before I found out how much I hated biology. Everyone knew me

there, and they knew what I was there for. They showed me into the room with the steel table and white linoleum floor. The doctor came in through the door that connected to his office. He was always a very sensitive vet, and he was no different with me. He had known me for most of my life, and he knew how important Mystic was to me.

We carefully pulled my cat out of his carrier and the doctor examined him one last time. He said that he could give Mystic some antibiotics and we could try to keep him going if that was what I wanted. I seriously considered it for a few moments. Then I looked at Mystic and I knew I couldn't do it. Sure, it might buy him some extra time, but how great would that time be? He was already sixteen years old. He was suffering, and if I loved him, *truly and deeply loved him*, I had to find it in my heart to let him go. I said as much, and the doctor said he thought I was making the right decision.

He left the room to prepare the injections and it was just me and my mom in the examination room. She sat in one of the chairs, letting me have my moment with Mystic. In those few moments I just stroked his back and let his hair fly all around me. Now it was my turn to be there for him just as

he had been there for me so many times. The doctor came back with the prepared syringes and I steeled myself. The first one, he said, would put Mystic into a light coma so he wouldn't feel any pain, but it would make him drowsy and confused while it took effect. The second one would do the deed once Mystic had fallen asleep. I nodded, and he proceeded with the first shot.

After a few minutes, Mystic's faded turquoise eyes dilated, becoming fuzzy and unfocused. He jumped from the table and began to wander the room, his walk growing more unsteady every step. He began to make low yowling noises that I had never heard him make before. I sank to the ground and sat on the linoleum. He drunkenly wandered over to me and flopped into my lap, looking to me for comfort in a world gone mad.

I couldn't keep my composure any longer. I began to weep—real, honest, tears from the deepest part of my soul. I held Mystic close to me as he drooled all over my shirt. I held him and I thanked him for everything: for being my friend when I had none, for being my comfort, for being my lifeline. Once his eyes closed, the doctor knelt to the ground and administered the second shot while Mystic was still in my arms. After a few more

moments, Mystic was gone. Just as I had held him on the day he came into the world, I held him as he left it.

I had a long time on the drive home to think. I made it about 30 minutes before I was crushed by a wave of guilt. This was *my* fault. Mystic had been *my* cat. I should have done so much more for him. I should have taken him with me. We could have had so much more time together... It didn't matter that he had been old. If I had been better, done better, he could have lived a longer and better life. He deserved more. I vowed that I would be better for my future cats, for his sake. I sobbed the rest of the drive home.

It's been almost seven years since Mystic died. I miss him terribly, and I keep a picture of him in my living room. Sometimes I still cry when I think about our last day together. I kept the shirt I wore on that day, but I never wore it again. I would pull it out of my closet thinking I could wear it, but then memories of Mystic's lifeless body in my arms would come flooding back and I just couldn't put it on. I think maybe I was holding onto that last connection, clinging to the last moments I had with Mystic, hoping there was still cat hair somewhere in it. I only recently

gave that shirt away. It was hard, but it was finally time for me to let it go.



I have this cat. If I showed you a picture of him, you might think he is just a long haired black cat, albeit an exceptionally beautiful one. You would be wrong. A picture isn't enough to convey the silky softness of his fur with its subtle tones of red in the sunlight and the few stray strands of white on his chest. Nor would it convey to you the depth of his absinthe eyes, dilated with playful excitement. No, a photo would never do him justice.

His name is Loki, but he goes by many other nicknames in our house: Bub, Bublin, Mister Baby, Brother, and a few others. Loki is the best cat ever! But Loki also has this weird habit—Loki sucks. Loki sucks on shirts, like a baby sucking on a bottle. He has from the minute we brought him home as a kitten.

At first, I was beyond confused by this behavior. I've had cats all my life but had never encountered this before. After a few

months I became worried and did a little research into the matter. What Loki does is called “wool sucking,” even though he almost exclusively chooses my cotton shirts.

There are several reasons why he might wool suck. The most likely reason, I found, was that Loki was weaned from his mother too early. This makes a lot of sense. When we adopted him, he was barely eight weeks old. I will always remember the day he joined our family. It was the middle of July and it was stupidly hot outside. We went to a no-kill shelter in the height of kitten season. This shelter had kittens coming out the wazoo! Everywhere you looked there were dozens of baby cats ranging from 6 weeks to 6 months old. They had so many that they had to put up temporary kennels in the lobby to hold them all. I am a cat lady, so this was my idea of heaven! I had gone into a few rooms to play with some kitties, but none of them were *mine*. Then I stepped out into the lobby and I saw him: a black ball of fluff with greenish-yellow eyes in a kennel all alone. I was done. Dazzled by cuteness, I told my boyfriend that that was the one. The shelter attendant asked if we wanted to play with him a bit to make sure we were a good match. Nope, I didn't. I was completely certain.

The people at the shelter gave us a temporary carrier and we put him in it. I left

the top open while we did the paperwork. He was so fearless. He kept popping his head out of the box to stare at my boyfriend and me. His shelter name was Jeff... It didn't suit him at all. Then the shelter lady began to give us a rundown of his (brief) history. Jeff (Loki) had been separated from his mother at 4 weeks because of a bad upper respiratory infection. Though he had gotten better, he had been kept in isolation until they had placed him in the kennel for adoption *that day*.

Can you imagine? This poor, adorable kitten had been taken from his mother before he could even eat solid food. He must have been so scared... sick and alone, with no other cats to comfort him or teach him how to be a cat. This separation and isolation may be a big factor in Lokis sucky behavior. Not only did he still want to nurse on his mom, but it also provided a sense of comfort in a new situation.

I may have made a mistake by indulging his behavior. But how could I not? It was the only time I could get him to purr! And, this is going to sound weird, but it was like a bonding time for us. It let us get to know each other. And we needed each other—he needed a home, and I needed a friend. My house was often empty because my boyfriend was spending the majority of his time at work and school. I was also suffering from terrible

anxiety at the time and, now I realize, Loki was too. So really, when Loki would suck on the shoulder of my shirt it was comforting to us both. The sucking gave him a new nickname—Oedi-puss.



I took Loki for a checkup at the vet a while later to get some flea meds and vaccines. I mentioned the sucking to the vet, and she assured me that he would eventually grow out of it. He did *not* grow out of it. He still sucks all the time.

I can always tell when Loki wants to suck. As is with many males, when a mood overtakes him...he will not be denied. His eyes get very round, until there is almost no green left. His tail gets puffed up and he swishes it back and forth vigorously. He is already purring as he approaches me. This is a special purr—it has a trilling undertone to it that is meant to tell me that he needs attention *now*. It doesn't matter to him what I'm doing at the time, it simply can't be more important than snuggling. He will walk over whatever I have in my lap and hug me. He presses into my chest and nuzzles at me with his velvety muzzle. And then the noise. When Loki sucks he is loud! The insistent *snuck snuck snuck* fills the room and tells everyone what he is doing. His tail whips back and forth as drool spreads over my shoulder and his claws knead my tummy.

For a long time we tried to discourage Loki from sucking. We tried to play with him, we pushed him away, we closed the bedroom at night. But no matter what we tried, and we really *consistently* tried, he would force his

way up to suck. Recently my boyfriend and I decided it was time to give up the fight. So now when Loki wants to suck I let him. It isn't hurting him to do it, though his claws sometimes hurt me. But I grin and bear it. I will wrap my arms around him and hold him close as his cat spit permeates my clothing. When I get right down to it, it isn't only soothing for him, but for me too. Loki needs me like nothing else on this planet needs me. Loki may suck, but he is my fur baby.



Colophon

This chapbook was written in my apartment with a cat overseeing the entire operation from atop a cat tree. It uses Century Schoolbook typeface, as chosen by said cat, and is laser printed on some really thick paper from Costco. It is bound using cardboard, cotton batting, and quilting material specifically chosen to relate the content of the chapbook. It was machine quilted and sewn together by me, with some assistance from the cat. Okay, the cat decided to play with the thread and got hopelessly tangled, if I'm really being honest. There is probably some cat hair sewn into it somewhere.

No cats were harmed in the making of this chapbook.

Author Bio



Becca Anglesey is a Senior at the University of Washington. She is majoring in Society, Ethics, & Human Behavior with a minor in Creative Writing. Becca spent ten years as a classically trained pastry chef before pursuing her education, though she still loves to bake. She

currently lives in Lynnwood with her boyfriend and two cats, Loki and the Lady Sif.

Her dream is to be able to foster kittens and help them find their forever homes.