

A Lost Dog Finds Cat Paradise

Tails of Love and Mischief

For Sadie,
the purr-fect dog that
we didn't know we needed.





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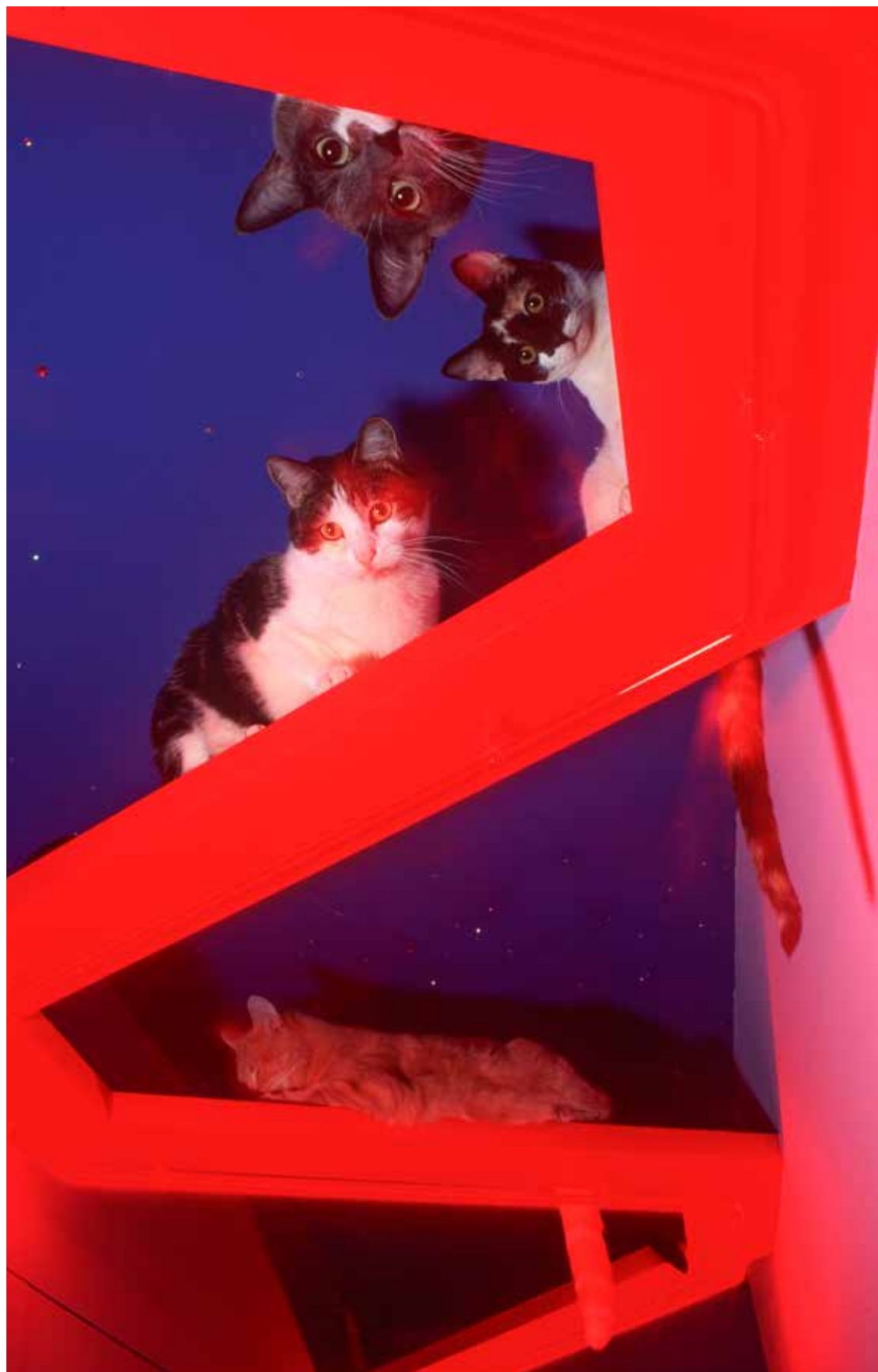
Bob Walker Photography

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Sadie, the Purr-fect Puppy



Arriving home from a filling Mexican dinner, we were greeted in the driveway by a starving chihuahua puppy; it jumped up and down at our legs, seeking food and shelter. Just the day before, Frances and I had adopted two neighborhood kittens, Willow and Zander, increasing our family to ten felines. We didn't need another critter to feed or try to train, especially a dog! After an unsuccessful search to find the lost puppy's home, we adopted adorable Sadie.

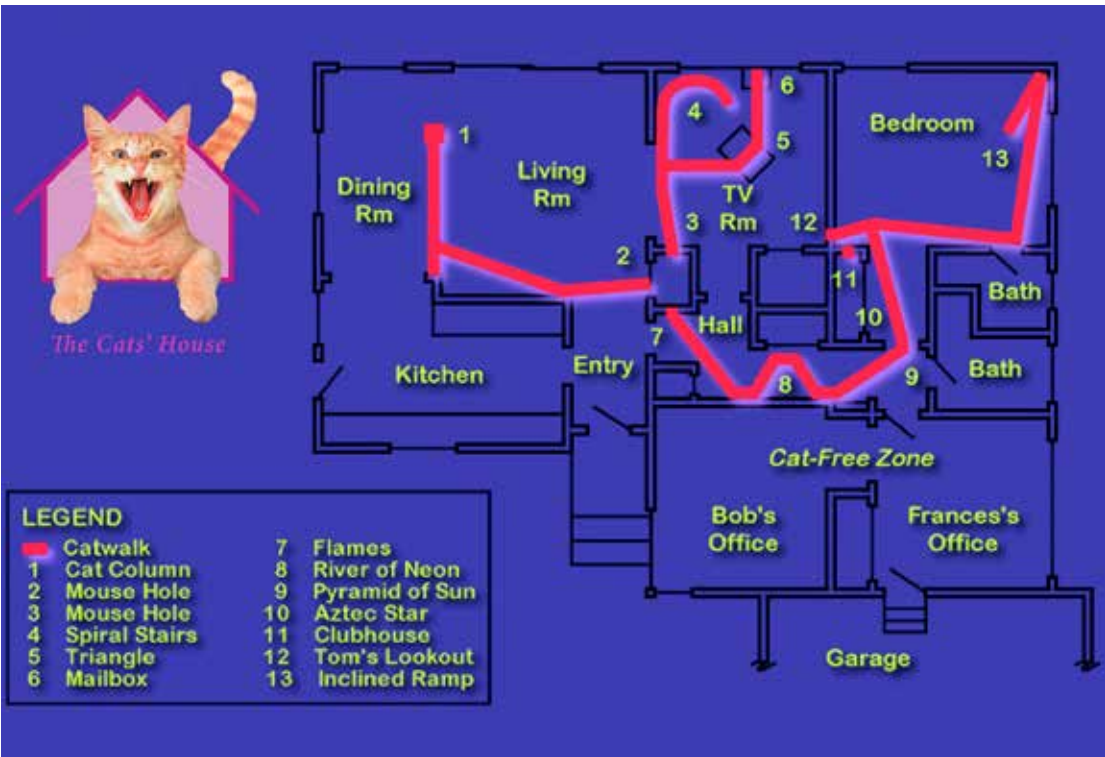
We hadn't expected that introducing a dog smaller than our cats would have such an outsized effect on The Cats' House. Our cat paradise had become a media attraction for crews because of its trendsetting, room-to-room overhead catwalk that we had personally constructed and installed. Sadie immediately made an impact on all inhabitants, claiming cat toys as dog toys, and gathering all playthings into her custody for safekeeping. The cats could have the ceiling. Sadie owned the floor and toys.

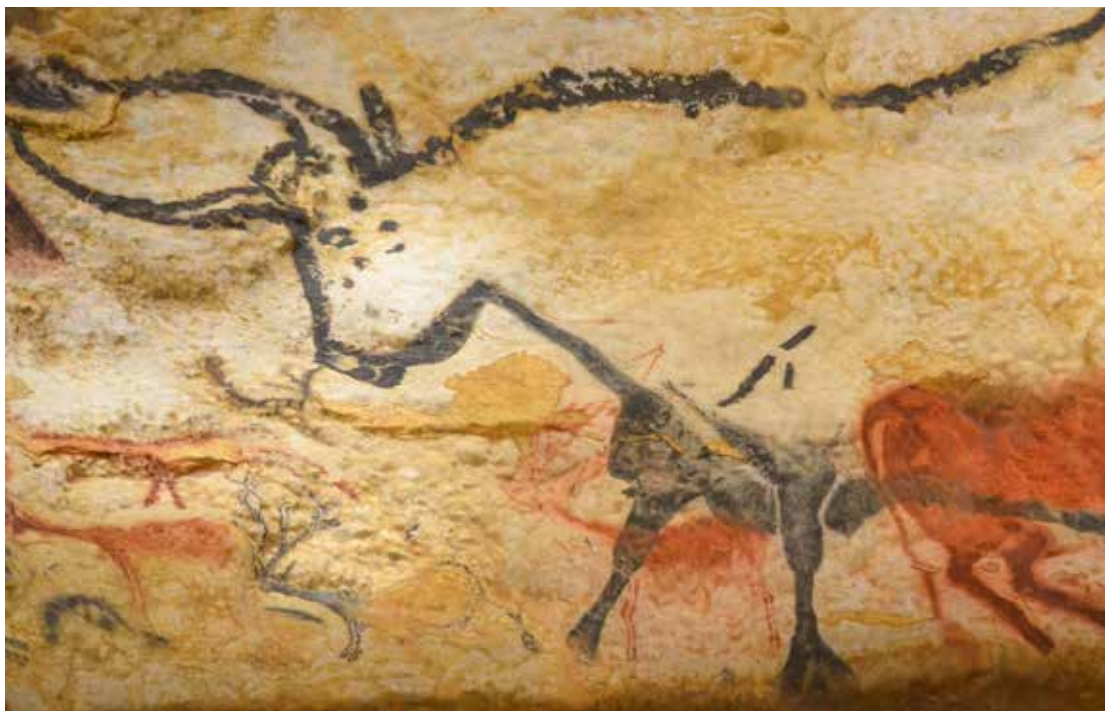
Three and a half years of photo-hounding Sadie, Willow, Zander, and our resident felines created this chronicle of their growth, joyful play, pesky mischief, countless nips and dreamy naps. Frances and I learned to embrace the unexpected and enjoy the ride, barks and all.

Cat Paradise

In 1987, Frances and I realized that we went to work each day leaving the house to our large family of felines. “If possession was nine-tenths of the law,” then our house truly belonged to the cats! They spent far more time in it than we did. The least that we could do for them was to cut giant cat-sized holes through the walls and connect the rooms with one hundred and forty feet of overhead feline highway. Our frisky felines loved using the elevated walkway to frolic above us, rest for peaceful naps, and escape from potential harm (trash trucks, wild children, humans trying to capture them for vet visits). The catwalk soon became their ultimate play center and sanctuary.

Our cats thought all cats lived this way. We thought all cats should. So, we made our private space public, in the hope that fellow cat lovers would be encouraged to make cat-friendly improvements for their companions. Our first book, *The Cats’ House*, attracted countless film and print crews and journalists to our “feline fantasyland,” becoming an inspiration for the pet environmental enrichment movement, a worldwide effort by animal lovers to provide solutions in homes and shelters for the physical and emotional needs of their pets.





Frances and I were inspired by early cave owners who decorated their walls with animals, so we put our cats on our walls—and overhead!





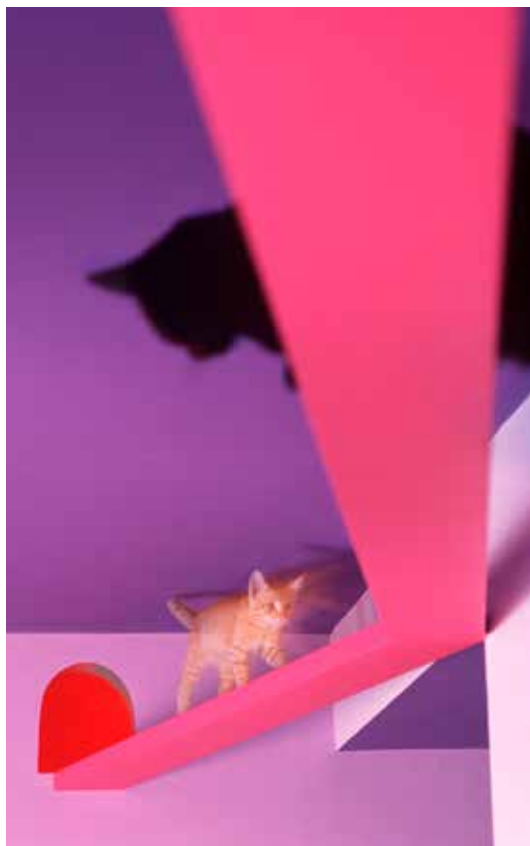


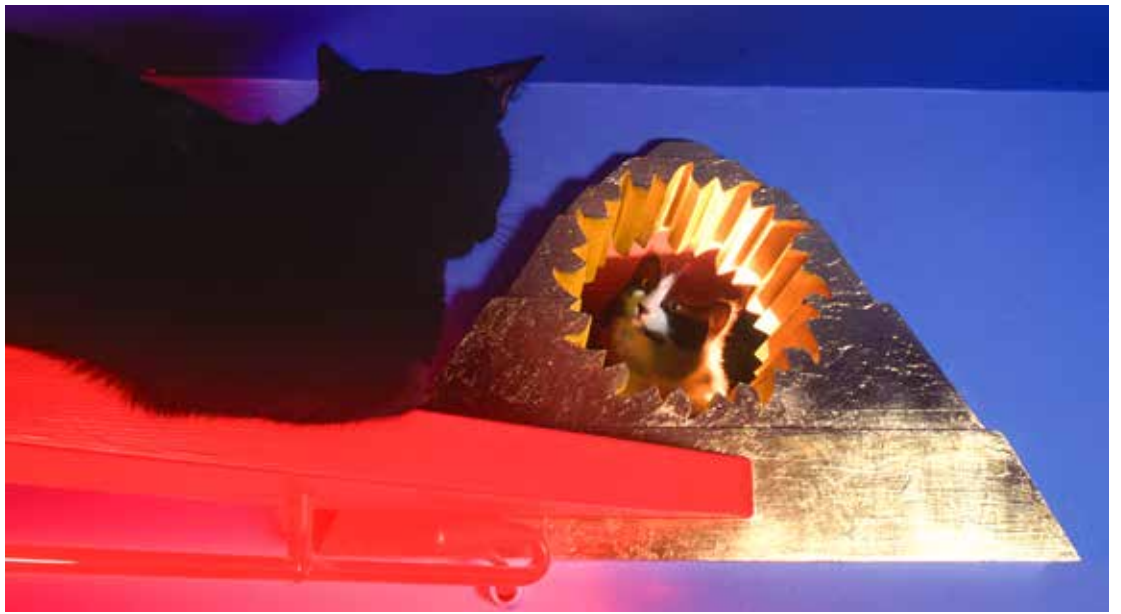
TomCat was delighted to have the cat face opening modeled from a photograph of him.

Like a secret observer peering through the cut-out eye holes of artwork hanging on a wall, black cat Joseph invisibly views all in our TV room.









Purr-fect Family

People ask “Which is your favorite?” It’s impossible to select one cat over the others. They’re all special in their own way. Besides, we’ve lost all objectivity. A good purr melts us in no time.



Stella

If you need to relieve stress or improve upon your day, pet Stella. She’s a “people” cat, always eager to please. Stella has the biggest smile of our feline family.



Charlotte

Sweet Charlotte snuggles close to our noses. She preps them with several scratchy licks, then lovingly gives a little bite. She keeps us well-groomed.

Sam

Sam is a lap cat. There's not a lap that doesn't need his warming. Even if you attempt to keep him off, he always wins. Sam knows that you need him.



Eddie

Eddie is a lovable leaver; he takes flight at the slightest hint of danger. But he's not a scaredy-cat. He's smart. Eddie knows it's best to survive today to meow another day.





Gus

Gus alerts us to meal times round the clock. Daylight Savings Time changes? He adjusts readily. An early feeding? He instantly switches to the New Feeding Time.



Dave

Quiet and lanky, Dave could easily blend into a cat crowd. But his distinctive black-and-white markings and white-tipped tail make him a sweet standout.

Lili

By far, Lili has the best purr. It's loud and vibrant. Her purr can be misleading, though. Lili protects her space and doesn't tolerate intruders within her area.



Elliott

Elliott trills for fish flakes. He craves the treat over the most expensive cat food. The tasty flakes provide the essential energy needed for his magnificent leaps.



Kittens Again!

Our neighbors, Pam and Helen, trapped Eleanor, a pregnant feral who gave birth to eight lovable kittens. In a casual conversation, we confided that long-haired kittens with a good purr were impossible to resist. Be careful what you reveal to neighbors! We yielded to temptation and adopted silky tabby Willow at ten weeks of age as well as her gray fluff brother Zander.

As we always do when introducing new family members, Willow and Zander were plopped on the living room floor in a carrier for our eight cats to adjust to the new arrivals—more kittens! The cats' initial reaction is always the same “How could you do this to us, again”? It shouldn't be a surprise anymore. Frances and I have adopted twenty-five cats over fifty-plus years of marriage.

Plenty of time is allowed for the newbies and resident felines (those not in hiding) to safely sniff and hiss at each other. Then, the undisciplined intruders are released. We jiggle feather toys and attempt to distract the kittens, so that the two brave welcoming cats (Sam and Dave) can observe and interact somewhat safely apart from the new arrivals.



Six of Eleanor's eight rescued kittens are visible. They were all lovingly nurtured to become playful and irresistible: Zander in foreground, Willow at back, Blue at far left, Jeannie with paw in the air, Jeff to Jeannie's right, and Toby to Zander's right. Not seen: Hannah and Tess.







Now, a Puppy?

The day after adopting Willow and Zander, we came home from a Mexican dinner, and a starving puppy greeted us on the driveway, repeatedly jumping up and down at our feet. After an exhaustive search to find its home, we adopted adorable Sadie.

She was brave beyond her size. Sadie instantly became the games leader, a fearless defender of her space (all areas that she had access to), and protective caretaker of all cat and dog toys.













Disappearing Act

Immediately, our feline family was hounded by rambunctious Sadie. Quick-as-cats, they sought refuge in puppy-proof hidey-holes, and overhead sanctuary on their catwalk.









Trouble Overhead

Willow and Zander quickly blossomed into lofty explorers, expanding their access to new heights and vistas. The catwalk became their lofty playground. No object or cat was now safe from them!





A Dog is Not a Cat

Sadie could go partway up the catwalk, but not down! She lacked the sharp-curved claws and flexibility of her cat companions. Sadie was more at home being overseer of the floor.





Sadie's Toys

Sadie is the Toy Master. She doesn't play well when Willow and Zander have fun with their toys. All toys are Sadie's, and need to be rescued for her safe keeping and future enjoyment.





























Lap Naps

Our fur family sticks to us through hot and cold. In winter, they keep us warm when nighttime San Diego temperatures plummet to the mid-forties, and in summer they dutifully warm our already warm laps. They're not about to allow variations in the weather to disturb their creature comfort.













Monsters Under the Bed

Strange noises kept awakening us at night. Looking under the bed, we discovered that the cats were burrowing and playing inside the box spring mattress; it was a fabulous playground for Sadie, also. The underside eerily resembled the shredded sails of a pirate ghost ship. The next day, we stapled plastic mesh to the support frame. Presto. No more creatures of the night disrupting our sleep!





Love Bites

Thankfully, there have been no serious wounds from our fur kids' rough and tumble play. However, short-haired Sadie's battle losses are more noticeable than those of her longer-furred sparring partners, like favorite playmate Zander. Ever-vigilant and fearless, Sadie is always game for sneak attacks. She may be small, but she's mighty (and uses her razor-sharp teeth to good advantage).









Egg Helpers

Kitchen kittens assist with morning egg preparation. Willow and Zander enthusiastically lend helping paws, then Sadie considerably removes the discarded shells from Frances' critter collage floor. In our labor-efficient home, everyone does their part.













Pet Peeve: The Cone

It's a bad day when at first you're feeling fine then are rudely taken to the animal hospital and given a shot, and wake up shaved and spayed, and wearing a ridiculous cone. But you can't let it get the best of you. You still need to eat, and play.





One minute you're comfy, the next you move slightly, and end up upside down!









Soon after Sadie recovered from her hospital ordeal, Zander broke his hip from awkwardly jumping off of our bed. Sadie was sympathetic—as much as an active chihuahua could be.

The Magic Leash

Sometimes good intentions have bad reactions. Only Sadie's sorrowful eyes and ears could move. Her body was frozen in place. The fashionable crochet sweater that Frances made for her was not a hit. It was a miserable miss!

A similar failure occurred on Sadie's first leash attempt. Frances and I had looked forward to her experiencing the sights and smells of the outside world. Instantly upon attachment, Sadie bit at the leash, while Willow and Zander did their best to rescue her.

Two months later, we tried again. Sadie froze again. Several shoves and pulls on the leash got her from our doorstep to the driveway. Finally, after multiple incremental forward movements, Sadie became mobile. Belly low to the ground, she took what we call a "short walk." After many attempts, Sadie realized that leashed walks were wonderful. In a short time, she jumped up and down, spun around, and barked when the magic leash was removed from its hook for her next outdoor adventure.

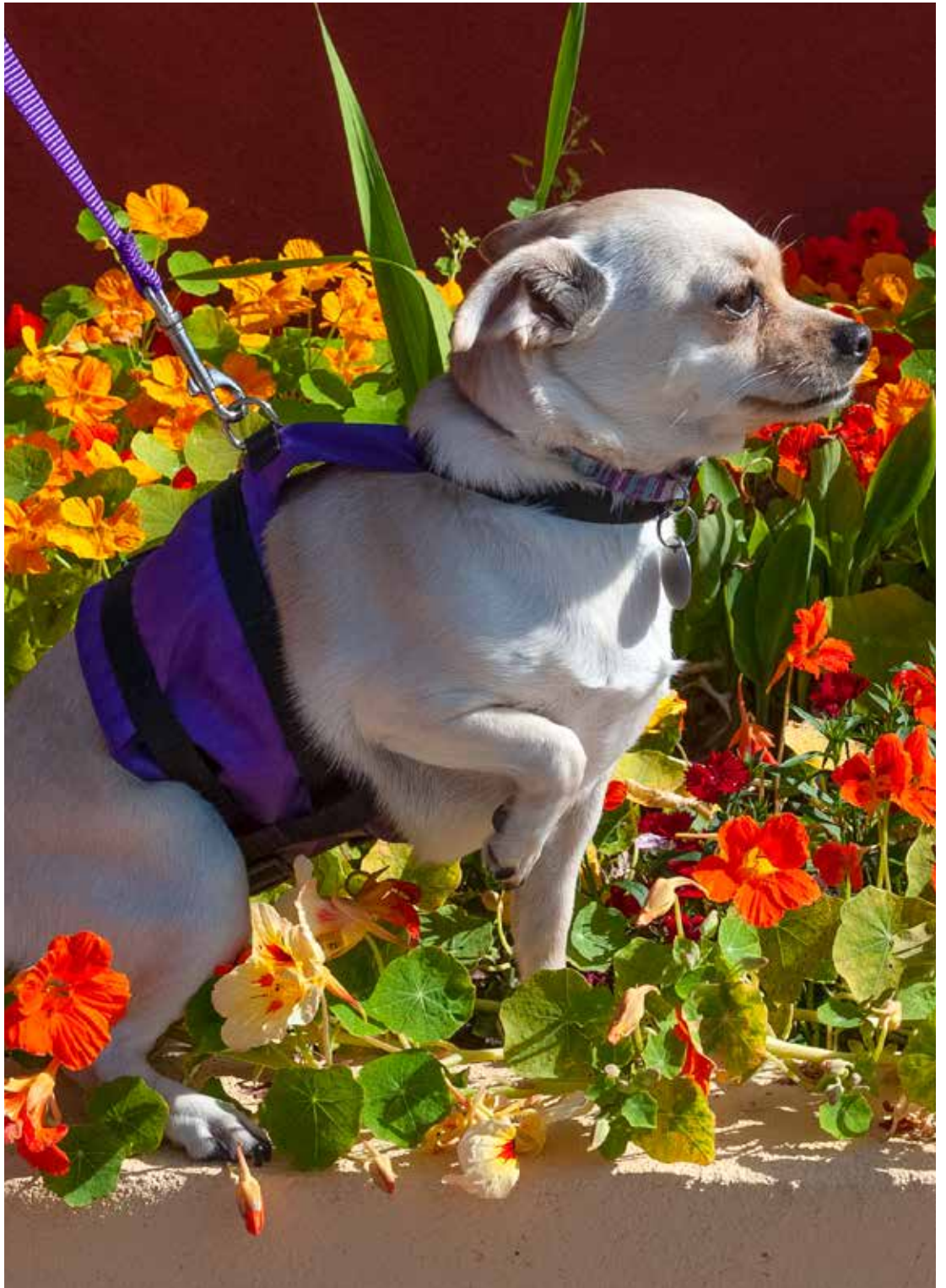












Chill Out Time

Lively games of chase can be exhausting, requiring restful naps and recharging. Unwinding and sunbathing is vital for healthful dogs and cats.

On average, our furry companions sleep at least twelve hours daily (youngsters and oldsters snooze almost twenty hours). And, of course, they lounge and groom for numerous more hours, leaving little time to take pictures of them in motion. Photographers need to be constantly on the prowl for action photos!













Go for Blah?

Frances and I were inspired by Sadie's triumph over the magic leash's powerful immobility spell. Her joyful success on outdoor walks energized us to overcome our own inertia. We decided it was "now or never" to extend our horizons, sell our home, and move cross-country with no family or job awaiting us.

But, what to do with The Cats' House? For twenty-seven years, it had attracted international attention for its overhead cat playground and vibrant wall colors. Frances and I thought all feline families should live this way. However, would anyone else want to purchase a house transformed for cats? After lots of back and forth, we decided that our more than forty shades of intense colors would be too much for most neutral-seeking homebuyers. There were potentially millions of cat-lovers that might feel at home in our "feline fantasyland" and appreciate the fancy infrastructure.

We opted to paint the house blah shades of white and light gray, leaving the one hundred and forty feet of catwalk in place. Amazing! The Cats' House sold to the first viewer on its first day of being showed (to a dog lover who removed our cat playground within two weeks of ownership).



The most difficult part of moving from our hometown was leaving family and friends. Longtime buddy Big Lou generously assisted with the whitewashing of our blue exterior walls. After a brief time, he requested that I inspect his progress. "BOB DON'T GO" was graffitied in giant, bold caps, a touching and creative gesture by a truly special friend.



The House Moves

Before offering our Cats' House for sale, we purchased a twenty-six-year-old Winnebago RV (without having ever driven one), and parked it on the driveway, living in it for several weeks with our fur family while the house was being refurbished. Our eight cats and dog were happy driveway campers exploring every nook and cranny while jockeying for the best nap locations. Thankfully, for our protection, Sadie dutifully barked every time anyone walked by.

Imagine the felines' and canine's surprise (and flight to safe havens) when I revved up their new home's engine, and moved it to Campland on the Bay, a deluxe RV park four miles away on San Diego's beautiful Mission Bay waterfront. At check-in, the attendant told us they didn't allow "no pit bulls or angry chihuahuas." Fortunate for us, Sadie was our protector, not an "angry" chihuahua. She only barked when fellow campers got too close to her RV.

Conveniently, the relocation to the campground allowed us to finish packing during the day, and relax nightly to bayside concerts, and enjoy watching kids happily riding their bicycles illuminated by Campland's fun lighting kits.

While packing for our departure to the mid-Atlantic, a good friend attempted to dissuade Frances and me from moving by advising us that "we wouldn't know anyone back there." Shortly after the cautionary counsel, the Associated Press contacted us to do a follow-up article on The Cats' House. We informed them that the house was in the process of being sold, eliminating the reason for additional coverage. Undeterred, AP ran a syndicated story about the forthcoming sale of our cat paradise and move to the opposite coast. Print and TV affiliates nationwide trumpeted our impending arrival. An online search yielded almost seven pages of links to articles! Any fears were put to rest. We now felt confident about making new animal lover friends on our exciting venture forward.





A Paw Note



In fifty-plus years together, Frances and I have shared countless paws-itive experiences with our twenty-seven fur family companions, each unique and special. Selecting a favorite would be impossible and unfair. Each was beloved in their own way.

I must admit, however, that I fell head-over-tail in love with Sadie. Her joyful barks and spins each time that I came home, the endless belly rubs she offered to soothe my daily nerves, and our nightly bed cuddles created a lasting bond of wholehearted best friendship.

A Lost Dog Finds Cat Paradise is my visual homage to Sadie's discovery, growth, and camaraderie with our Cats' House family.



Special Appreciation: Frances Mooney, best human friend/partner, lover and collector of all things cat (and infinite other stuff); Laurie Fox, Linda Chester Literary Agency, forever friend who inspired and made my author path possible.