

Choosing the Right Pet for You Part 2: Cats

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For those of you who have decided to adopt a companion cat, there is a plethora of beautiful 'older' felines waiting for you to meet in area shelters. I stress 'older' for good reason.

Kittens, while adorable and fun to be around, can be a challenge for seniors with equilibrium issues. If you've ever watched a kitten self propel straight into the air from a standing position, you would know what I meant. Kittens not only understand gravity, they live to defy it. For seniors with a tenuous gait that delightful explosion of feline energy can be a bit unsettling not to mention dangerous.

In contrast, the older cat's energy level is more sedate. She sleeps several hours a day and when awake will play as long as her owner wants, and not the other way around. Kittens, like their human counterpart, the toddler, have boundless energy with an internal clock that is always set to Australian time.

My choice for the senior looking for a feline companion is definitely a mature cat. If an older cat could campaign for your adoption 'vote' her motto would be:

'Been there, done that. A vote for me is a vote for quietude.'

With that said, I have three cats over the age of ten who would be highly insulted if they heard me describe them as semi conscious blobs of fur with little interest in life beyond my couch. That broad brush stroke would be an unfair portrayal of every older cat.

A perfect illustration of that is Rosie the 14 year old gal I fostered in New York several years back. Rosie would absolutely come alive for a ball of string. When her owner became ill and went into a nursing home, there was talk of putting her to sleep. I didn't think age was a good enough reason to deem her un-adoptable so I offered to foster her until a suitable home became available.

Older cats have lots of life in them and enjoy batting a ping pong ball or chasing a feather as much as kittens do. These toys will keep your adult cat exercised, and interacting with you for as long as you want. And that's my point. With an older cat, she won't insist on your undivided attention if *you* tire out first.

But there are ethical reasons for adopting an older cat as well. Through no fault of their own, (the death of an owner or move to a nursing home) more and more healthy adult animals are finding themselves in shelters across Orange County hoping for a second chance.

The next time you plan a visit to the shelter, please take a few minutes to spend with that timid looking cat cowering in the corner of her cage. Consider her fear, and confusion. One day you're in a home with your favorite person and the next, your whole world is turned upside down.

Now, try to imagine that same animal in a quiet, loving, home where the noises and smells are more like the ones she is used to. Picture that same animal blossoming into the wonderful companion you always dreamed of. Then follow your heart and take her home.

PS: 14 year old Rosie found her forever home with a gal in Vermont. The two bonded instantly and her guardian says Rosie has " .. become like second skin to me and I can't imagine life without her".