

It's Always Sunny Around Here

A journal of the rescue, rehabilitation, and thriving of an abandoned cat

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Introduction

I live in a twenty-person co-op in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago, and in summer 2025 we had a temporary sublesser who none of us really knew. Quickly we discovered that she was suffering pretty badly from some kind of mental illness; and three weeks before her sublease was over, she ended up exiting the house in an ambulance for a mental hospital, without leaving behind any way of contacting her about her possessions. Chicago eviction law prevented us from going in her room or doing anything with her things until her sublease ended on August 14th, but we also knew she owned a shorthaired orange tabby cat named Sunny who needed to be fed and checked on until then. Everyone else in the co-op was busy or out of town, so I volunteered to take on this daily feeding and checking, despite never having owned a cat in my life. The plan at that point was to just make sure he survived until the day we would be legally allowed to turn the cat over to an amazing neighborhood organization called Hyde Park Cats, to hopefully get adopted and move on to his forever home.

What I quickly discovered, though, was that the cat was profoundly sick, and was throwing up ten to fifteen times a day. After a day of people trading folk wisdom, blind guesses, and AI advice on our co-op's Discord channel, I finally contacted Hyde Park Cats and directly asked if they could help us at all with the situation. Using their connections, they managed to get us booked into the South Loop location of Partners Animal Hospital the next morning, where X-rays revealed that Sunny was having some kind of major digestive disorder that was causing him severe constipation. He was given a shot immediately, and we were sent home with two weeks of medication-laced wet food, but not before I paid a \$900 bill for services rendered out of my personal money. (To make sure you know the whole story, let me mention that my housemates and friends ended up donating \$750 towards this bill over the month that followed.) The doctor also said that, eviction law or no, Sunny could no longer spend 23 hours and 45 minutes per day alone in that dark, empty, dirty room anymore, so that's how it is that we celebrated the beginning of August 2025 at the co-op with Sunny and I as official roommates for the first time.

At that point I decided to do a crash-course at YouTube on being a cat owner for the very first time; and a search there on the subject led me quickly to professional animal behaviorist Jackson Galaxy, host of two popular cable shows over the years (*My Cat From Hell* and *Total Cat Mojo*), and author of four books on the subject. In fact, readers will quickly learn in this book that I mention Galaxy in literally almost every entry in this journal, so let me make it official here that I was not compensated in any way for these mentions, and that Galaxy is not associated with me or this book at all. I mentioned him so often merely because I was so bowled over by the insightfulness and accuracy of his thoughts about cats, and especially how much he's learned about what the inner "wild cat" brain is telling our pets. (One of the first facts to know about housecats is that, despite living in proximity to human farms for at least 10,000 years, they didn't become domesticated indoor pets until Queen Victoria made it popular in the late 1800s, so even modern housecats still share 96 percent of the DNA of the wild cats they used to be 10,000 years ago.)

One thing Galaxy highly encourages new cat "guardians" (the currently trendy parlance among rescue people) to do is keep a detailed journal of everything they're deliberately hyper-noticing about their new companion; being a behaviorist like he is, he fundamentally

believes that you can only interpret how a cat is doing based on the external behaviors you're seeing from them, but that outré behavior can't be interpreted unless you have a long and detailed understanding of the baseline behavior of that particular cat. That's what I began doing the day after Sunny moved into my room, specifically to keep a record of what kinds of cat foods he was trying, how he reacted, and how much money they were. (Another one of the hundreds of things Galaxy recommends to cat guardians is buying both a different brand and different type of cat food with each bulk purchase; if something ever happened to you that would require the cat to stay somewhere else for an extended period, some cats have been known to literally starve themselves to death if not given the specific brand of food they'd been fed their whole life.)

Within these journal entries you will see me try a whole variety of advice Galaxy suggests in his videos and books, almost all of which worked. I also detail the growing bond between Sunny and myself in these weeks leading up to my legal ownership of him, the turbulent emotions I went through whenever he was upset or sick, and how profoundly moved I felt when he finally adopted me into his tribe and we would go hunting together every evening. You'll find all of that and a lot more in the following pages, so I hope you enjoy one guardian's look at the first few months of post-trauma life after an abandoned cat's rescue.

August 4, 2025. Began a 24-pack of Purina Fancy Feast Gravy Lovers Chicken Feast Pate (\$1 per three-ounce can, or \$2 per day). For the first time today I'm mixing in Purina One +Plus dry food. I fed Sunny at 8 a.m. and the food was gone by 10:30, so I left a handful of dry food in the bowl for grazing, which I witnessed the cat doing a little bit. I fed wet food mixed with dry food again at 5:30, but Sunny barely ate it at first, although he did end up finishing it all by 10:30 that night. After dinner, I noticed he was less receptive than usual to pets and cuddles, he was meowing more than usual, and at one point he snuck back under the couch and had to be coaxed out again, so my working theory at the moment is that the dry food upset his stomach. I will try a day without it tomorrow and see how he does.

Sunny only tried to play with me in the middle of the night last night once, but quickly went away when I ignored his pawing, which Galaxy recommends cat guardians do. He then came back around 6 a.m. when he saw that I was awake. Each time I stopped in the room today, he was laying under the couch in the back corner, and I've noticed that this is also where he goes when I'm in the room but am too busy to play with him, so I'm going to try transitioning him to a "carrier cave" once my new supplies arrive.

Based on the Galaxy video I saw this weekend that said that cats are at their liveliest at twilight (since this is such a great time to catch prey unawares), I let Sunny out of the room around 7:15 tonight, and he indeed had his most courageous day in the third floor yet, spending an entire twenty minutes out, making it all the way to the eastern stairwell, exploring the inside of my housemate A.'s open room, and even having to be carried back instead of running back in a panic on his own like previous trips. (By the way, this was also the first time I've ever carried Sunny somewhere, and it went well; using the carrying technique I learned from Galaxy videos this weekend, he stayed civil and calm in my arms all the way back to the room.)

About 8:30, Sunny got frisky again, following me around the room as I did some chores, rubbing up against many surfaces and pacing back and forth. The reason is unknown to me. He seemed to now be doing okay again with hanging out socially with me on the couch while I watched videos, so maybe I won't assume his stomach was upset, but instead what Galaxy says in one of his videos, that cats can spend so much time in their chosen cave that eventually that becomes their default hangout space. Galaxy's solution is to physically block off the underside of the sofa, and instead create an intentional and mobile cave in a dark corner of the room out of your carrier, and that way the cat will welcome it instead of fight it on vet days and the like. My new carrier is coming tomorrow, so I'll be blocking off the sofa bottom and installing that in a dark corner then.

At 10:15 p.m., he scratched at the door to go out, and when I opened it he bolted out and headed straight for the other side of the house and A.'s open room. He once again spent about fifteen minutes out wandering around and exploring things, until a returning housemate spooked him back to my room.

August 5, 2025. Sunny didn't bug me at all in the middle of the night last night, although as always, he did come over and hang out with me beginning at 6 a.m. when he saw I was awake. Sunny seems reticent about the bed; he never gets on it unless I'm in it, and even then he seems to have a hard time finding a comfortable position. He continues to remain vomit-free, but there was a little bit of bile on the floor when I got up.

Sunny was pacing and meowing a lot when I got up this morning, which normally I would interpret as hunger; but since I established yesterday that he's eating to satiation, I'm now thinking it was more about establishing his morning ritual. (And indeed, he only ate about half his food this morning when I first put it down.) Today I plan on only feeding him wet food, once at 8 a.m. and once at 8 p.m. (hopefully after our first play session with his new toy), to see how he reacts. This is yet something else Galaxy talks about over and over in his videos, that dry cat food is essentially the same thing as frozen dinners for humans; both of them were designed by scientists after World War Two, both of them for the purpose of creating the cheapest and most shelf-stable "food-like" items as possible, at the expense of both of them being not even the tiniest bit healthy at all.

My first big shipment of cat owner stuff arrived this afternoon. Let me detail all the items one at a time.

First, I got a new carrier, so that it will be totally divorced from any negative memories Sunny has of his previous one. It has backpack straps, so that it'll be easier for me as an urban pedestrian to take him out of the house. Galaxy recommends setting this up as an intentional cave (what he calls a "cocoon"), so I've set it up in a dark, hard-to-reach corner of my room, right underneath the plastic tube that goes from my floor AC to the window, and have covered it with a fleece blanket to block out the otherwise transparent mesh on three of the four sides. Sunny has already stuck his head in just on his own, and then dived halfway in when I put treats in; but he has so far not gotten all the way into it yet. I suspect I'll first have to do the other half of Galaxy's advice, to block off the area the cat had already chosen by default as his cave, underneath the sofa in the farthest corner of the room in my case.

I got a water fountain, again because of Galaxy; he says that unlike dogs, cats do not have a genetic instinct to drink from still pools of water, and actually get most of their daily liquid in the wild from the bodily fluids of the prey they catch. Many of them are nuts for running water, though, so we'll see how Sunny takes to this. He was certainly very curious and enthusiastic just about its existence once it turned on, but he hasn't worked up the courage yet to actually approach it. I've taken away his old water bowl, so he'll have to approach the new one soon. So far in my one week of having Sunny in my room, I've noticed that it takes him a while to work up the courage to approach something new and challenging, but that he keeps at it a little each day and eventually always succeeds, so I'm confident he'll be drinking out of the fountain in no time.

I got a thin and flat cat bed (what Galaxy calls a "cat frisbee"), and three cat-themed terry towels for leaving on my windowsill, the carrier, and the folding table next to my computer. This is yet more advice from Galaxy, to set up a series of "scent soakers" all over the places where the cat usually hangs out. Cats have twenty times more smell receptors than we do (they even have scent sensors in the toes of their paws), so they imprint themselves all over the places where they hang out, and also imprint their owner's smell into them (one of the reasons a cat responds so much better to the person they spend the most time with). Galaxy says not only is this a great

way to provide something that will soak up scents extra well, making the cat extra satisfied, they're things you can put inside carriers or a new sleeping space to help comfort the cat and let him know that things are alright. I put the bed in the space on my couch Sunny spends the most time in, the far back corner, not just because it's farthest from everything else in the room, but because it gets the most sunlight from the nearby southwest window, and this evening he's finally started sitting on it for the first time. He hasn't tried any of the towels yet, so I'll stay patient.

I got a new bag of cat litter for myself, after first using a bag my housemate S. gave me. Galaxy unsurprisingly has a lot to say about this subject, too; namely, to determine if a cat litter is good, spread some out and then press down hard with your hands, and realize that this is what it feels like to your cat's paws. In other words, he recommends stuff that's the closest to sand or clay you can buy, and to always avoid crystals and pellets (the kind my housemate gave me). Also, make it unscented; don't keep a top on the litter box; make sure the box is one and a half times the size of your cat; scoop it once a day (twice if you can stand it), because just like humans, cats don't like stepping around in their own crap; and replace the entire litter once a month. In general, Galaxy reminds us that cats are doing us a huge favor by learning to crap in a box in the first place, and that they deserve that we make it as clean and pleasant an experience as possible. The cat litter bag is massive (forty pounds!), so I won't be tackling getting it up to my third-floor bedroom until tomorrow, when I can get out my dolly.

I got a new scratching post, with both horizontal and vertical features, the same height as Sunny stretched up on his hind legs (yet another thing Galaxy recommends in yet another of the literal 75 videos of his I obsessively watched at YouTube this weekend). The entire thing is made of cardboard, bamboo slats, and plastic screws, so it cost almost nothing. Sunny took to it immediately, so now it's just a matter of training him off his default scratching spot of my couch arm.

I got a cute collar, because he's going to need one if I can get him acclimated into being a house cat who freely roams the third floor, because it's way too easy for someone to forget to shut the stairwell door, and the next thing you know the cat's made it all the way outside and into the street (something our old house cat Ada did repeatedly, and what eventually led to her death). But for now he enjoys his neck rubs too much, so I'm not going to collar him until absolutely necessary.

I got claw trimmers, but I don't have the experience or courage yet to actually try them. I'm going to get them professionally trimmed at the vet next week and watch how they do it, before I try it myself. Galaxy says you should be trimming them once a month. Who knows how long it's been since Sunny's had his trimmed, but certainly you can see the sharp tips sticking out even when the claws are withdrawn, and I get a very light scratch these days even when he's innocently pawing me.

I got a brush, which Sunny didn't mind when I made a few brief strokes right after opening it, but also wasn't real excited about. I'm going to save it until he's super chillaxed and then see what he thinks of me slowly brushing him. I also bought a comb last week on the advice of S. (who owns a long-haired cat), but Sunny as a short-haired cat didn't really care for it. For now he seems to actually like human petting way more than the brushing.

I got a bulk order of lint rollers, just for myself.

And then finally is the big news, that I got a wand toy for the very first time. This is a huge subject with Galaxy; he not only makes his number-one piece of advice to all cat owners

“play with your cat, play with your cat, play with your cat,” he claims there’s only one toy you ever need to own, and that’s the kind with a bright lure on the end of some fishing line that’s attached to a stick. He has a cutesy social-media-friendly phrase for this as well, which is that “prey equals play,” meaning that what we call “playing” with our cat is actually the cat very deadly seriously trying to catch and kill that night’s dinner. The wand toy is the only toy that can realistically recreate the jittery, random movements of a mouse or bird, and so Galaxy claims is the only kind of toy cats will consistently react to.

And sure enough, this turned out to be exactly true: after trying over twenty different kinds of toys S. donated to us while I waited for my own order, and having him react with literally nothing else but bored disgust, he went nuts for the wand toy the very first time I got it out. Galaxy said to expect a style of diminishing returns to a cat’s “prey play,” which mimics the style of first fiercely fighting a live mouse and then the mouse becoming more and more dead; the cat will vigorously play for, say, two minutes, then pause, then play one minute, pause, play for twenty seconds, pause, and then maybe play once more for a few more seconds before being done for good. And sure enough, that’s exactly what Sunny did tonight, resulting in a short but intense prey-play period of about ten minutes, combined with his nightly twenty minutes out in the hallway, which he now does every evening at twilight.

What Galaxy recommends doing at that point, then, is setting up an evening routine beginning at twilight that most closely mimics what they’re genetically hardwired for—a six-step process that Galaxy labels as “hunt, capture, kill, eat, groom, sleep” (HCKEGS). So that’s what we did this evening for the very first time: we explored the hallway and did prey-play from 7:30 to 8:00; he ate from 8:00 to 8:15; then he hung out on the couch with me until bedtime at 10:30, as I watched streaming video while giving him unending pets and cuddles (or “infinite love,” as I jokingly refer to it when talking out loud to the cat, something else Galaxy recommends; I’ve built an elaborate story about how Sunny is actually the crown prince of the Kingdom of Infinite Love). Sunny seemed extremely satisfied with this routine, and Galaxy says it’s highly important to establish a strong routine with the cat that it can rely on, so I just plan on repeating that every evening for the time being.

Finally, let me mention that at two cans of wet cat food today (twelve hours apart, one at 8 a.m. and one at 8 p.m.), and no dry food at all, Sunny seemed very satisfied, didn’t whine or beg for any more food, but was full enough that he didn’t immediately gulp either of the cans completely down, but rather spaced each out over the course of about two hours. He was also very lively and adventurous all day and all evening, and didn’t spend even a second under the couch, even when I checked in with him randomly during the day today. It seems for now that we’ve finally found the right combination of food type, food amount, and food timing, so I again plan on just sticking with this until a point may develop where it’s no longer working.

August 6, 2025. Woke up to some chaos this morning. Apparently when I first transferred the previous owner's cat stuff to my room a week and a half ago, her old bag of treats ended up slipping down beneath my bookcase without me noticing; and apparently Sunny didn't notice until last night either, at which point it looks like he tore it open with his teeth, ate about half the treats, then proceeded to vomit four different times all over my room. He also managed to dig into one of my room's mouse holes last night and extract a piece of steel wool the maintenance team had stuffed in there a year ago; but there were no bite marks in it, and Sunny's behaving perfectly normally this morning, so I'm assuming for the moment that he played with it but didn't chew any of it. (I suspect chewing on steel wool is as unpleasant to cat teeth as it is to mouse teeth, which is the whole reason to stuff it inside mouse holes in the first place.) I'll be monitoring him throughout the day; but for the moment, this looks like a simple case of the cat having "too many sweets" and then throwing up from all the rich food. It's a great (and thankfully non-emergency) reminder that you can catproof a room as much as possible, but that cats are crafty and intelligent creatures, and so you will always be dealing with issues that you either forgot about or didn't know existed in the first place.

Today I had the rare opportunity to catch Sunny poop, and I noticed him scooting his butt along the floor afterwards, which Google is telling me is the sign of an irritated anus. So that's something to mention to the vet at the hospital next week. [Note: I learned later that this was because of using an inferior brand of cat litter; I'll be talking more about that in an upcoming journal entry.]

Since community dinner isn't until 7:30 tonight, I decided to start Sunny on his HCKEGS cycle an hour earlier than normal, before I myself ate instead of after. Tried the bird feather lure on the wand toy for the first time, but he seemingly had not even the slightest interest in it, although he did respond well again to the one shaped like a worm. He was at his most comfortable yet in the hallway, and in fact actually walked out quickly ahead of me to get down to A.'s room fast, which is the very first time he's been willing to go forward in the hallway beyond where I was standing already. He was startled by a housemate who suddenly came in from the stairs, and bolted back towards my room; but to his credit, instead of running all the way back, he stopped at the first hallway bend (the third floor of our co-op is shaped like a U) and then peered around the corner at us, wanting to see what the latest was with the stranger danger.

And finally, a wonderful moment today. For two days now, I still haven't seen Sunny approach his new water fountain, which hasn't had me worried since I rarely ever saw him drink from the bowl of still water either, and I know from Galaxy's videos that cats actually get most of their daily water from the prey they eat. But I was adjusting the fountain a little bit today, and was bending straight over it and moving it with my outstretched hands, when Sunny suddenly wandered through the archway of my arms and took a sip from the fountain. I know there are several different possible explanations for this (for example, "Oh, human doing something; what human doing?"), but I like to think that Sunny has now imprinted with me so much at this point, he literally got the courage to finally approach the fountain only after I was there already and showing him it was safe. Awwwww!

August 7, 2025. Two big insights about the cat this morning. First, based on how much Sunny has been taking to prey-play and hallway exploring at twilight in the evening, I suspected he might do the same thing during dawn in the morning, and that this in fact might be what he's trying to say whenever he jumps up on my bed at 6:00 every morning and paws my face. So this morning, since I feed him right around that time anyway, I decided to duplicate the HCKEGS cycle I do in the evening, and he indeed responded passionately to it.

And then second, on yet another hunch, today I actually left all the artificial lights off in my room when prey-playing, so that he could hunt just by the dim light of dawn itself; and this time for the first time, he not only chased the worm lure but would also grab it with his paws and shake it to "death" with his teeth. I'm taking this as a very positive sign, and more evidence of what Galaxy is always saying, that the more you can think like a cat when interacting with them, the happier the cat will be. I will absolutely now be doing this at twilight as well, prey-playing in just the natural darkening sundown alone, and not turning on any artificial lights.

Since I work from home (specifically, from the kitchen), I end up checking in on Sunny three or four times each day, because of needing things in my room throughout the day as well. Each time I do, he whines and moans about going out; so since I'm trying to get him acclimated to the hallway these days anyway, I figured I might as well indulge him more, as long as I have the time and he has the interest. So today we went out not only at breakfast but lunch, only about ten minutes altogether before a wandering housemate spooked him (although to his credit, instead of retreating under the sofa, he stood at the doorway of my room and watched us have our conversation in the hallway).

Tonight's twilight prey-play, done for the first time with no artificial lights on, was just as successful as the experiment this morning at dawn; so that's what I'll be doing from now on, seven twilights a week or at least as many as I can pull off. Delightful for me as well, to finish up a fun dinner with a big group of humans on the front porch, laughing and having fun interactions with a two-year-old baby who currently lives here with us, then to creep back silently into my barely lit room while sneering in a serial killer voice, "And now it's time to hunt." *MEOW!* [Continuing sinister voice] "That's right, Sunny. Time to hunt...catch...and kill." *MEOW!*

I'm also leaving my door open during prey-play, since this doubles as the time Sunny gets to roam around the third-floor hallway for as long as he wants (twenty minutes a few times now, but more often five to ten before something like a human or a door slam spooks him back to my room). For now we're doing 100 percent of the prey-play in my room, because he's still too wary about just being in the hallway at all, which makes a lot more sense now that I've begun Galaxy's very informative book *Total Cat Mojo*. In it he explains that cats instinctually understand they're in the middle of the food chain, so that at the same time they're hunting for prey, they're prey themselves to bigger creatures than them.

That means during hunting time, a cat has to be on both the offense and defense simultaneously; and since in the wild it's usually the case that you'll just see the cat run when threatened instead of fight, they're looking at every situation saying, "Okay, what's my best exit strategy here?" and then always being ready at a millisecond's notice to enact it. It also neatly explains why Sunny is particularly reticent about going down the third turn of our U-shaped third-floor hallway, over on the east side (my room is on the extreme west edge); there's nothing in that stretch but one bedroom door and the east stairwell door, both closed during his prey-play, so it's a dead end for the cat. Galaxy explains in his book that cats instinctually avoid dead ends like the plague, which is why you need to be careful when building vertical hangout spaces for cats that that space can be navigated as a full circle.

My housemate N. came by the room during our prey-play time, and sat down at the edge of my bedroom door and let Sunny come over. She along with our housemate H. and I were the first three people to start providing caregiver duties to the cat, starting the evening after her original owner first left; so all three of us are “scent imprinted” on Sunny as safe (as Galaxy explains in yet another video I’ve recently watched), since we were the very first ones to give him food, water, and attention, and for the first week after abandonment were the only three people he interacted with. That was easy to prove here, because the moment N. sat down on the floor, Sunny immediately marched directly up to her and began demanding pets and cuddles, in a way he doesn’t with anyone else besides a very select group (essentially us, H., and two of our boarders who are cat guardians themselves).

The goal right now is to get him imprinted the same way about people on the third floor who would like to interact with him, like A.; she leaves her bedroom door open all day, so Sunny ends up spending a lot of time in there during his prowls, sniffing out the environment, which we all hope will lead to him maybe able to just be let loose unsupervised in the third floor hallway during the day. That’s the goal I’m shooting for, and at the moment we’re spending between thirty minutes and one hour out in the hallway each day (short dawn session, short noon session, long twilight session), so we’re well on our way. That feels like pretty good progress for a cat who up to a week and a half ago was deathly sick and spending 23 hours and 45 minutes per day alone in a dirty room that usually holds a dog, and before that spending who knows how long being cared for by a mentally ill person who was giving the cat who knows what kind of care.

August 8, 2025. Another successful sunrise HCKEGS session. I'm very happy to see the cat continuing to eat only half his food when I first put it out, and only slowly finishing the rest over the course of the next two hours. He whines and paces starting about a half-hour before every meal, and it would be tempting to think this means he's not getting fed enough; but by him not wolfing down every bite of food the moment he gets it, I can feel pretty sure that his restlessness before meals is simply the cat's natural behavior in the wild, him getting himself geared up and ready to go hunting for that particular meal.

I learned something interesting in *Total Cat Mojo* today, that cats hunt for food around thirty times a day but with a high failure rate, resulting in about five to ten mice caught and eaten per day; and that the average mouse is about 30 calories, which means the average cat in the wild gets around 150 to 300 calories a day. I just looked up my current wet food, and it's 80 calories per three-ounce can; so at two a day, Sunny's getting in 160 calories a day (roughly equivalent to five mice), on the low end of the wild average but perfectly within its normal range. For now I'm assuming that with the more sedentary lifestyle of an indoor cat, and the extra crap companies put in commercial cat food, it's better to be on the low end than the high end, especially since Sunny hasn't been complaining about being hungry, or binging all his food the moment he gets it.

In comparison, I just looked up the dry food I initially bought the other week and eventually got rid of, and it's a whopping 375 calories per cup; so if you leave out two cups for a cat to graze on during the day, then feed it wet food in the morning and at night, like a lot of American cat owners do, you're now talking about 910 calories the cat's getting every single day, or over three times the amount even the most successful hunter in the wild gets on their best day of hunting. This is not to mention that even the supposedly healthy Purina ONE dry food I originally bought has rice, corn, and soybeans in it, which at first made me think it was good for him, since these are the same things that are good for humans; but Galaxy says that under no circumstances whatsoever should a cat be eating grains or carbs, because as an "obligate carnivore" (meaning not only that it eats meat but is compelled by its genetics to *only* eat meat), its system simply can't handle that kind of food, and that we're essentially forcing it on them for our own convenience and then tricking them into eating something not natural to their usual diet by spraying it with "meat juice." That certainly tracks with what I've witnessed in Sunny's behavior, on the days he's eaten dry food in the past (where he's become bloated and sick, and hides under the couch all day) versus how he behaves on days when he sticks exclusively to wet food (vigorous and friendly from sunup to sundown); so that's all the convincing I need to get rid of the dry food permanently.

Our twilight HCKEGS session went as well as always tonight. With all the elements of the last few days put together, Sunny is finally taking his hunt to "completion" by tackling the worm lure, sinking his fangs into it, and shaking it until it's "dead." (Another interesting fact from *Total Cat Mojo*: Cats are genetically optimized so to kill their prey in the quickest and most efficient way possible, so to save as much of the carcass as possible to actually eat.) But still, his hunting is only at 75 percent energy and over very quick, and I suspect it's because he's the kind of cat that only responds to a mouse lure and nothing else. (The wand toy I bought last week came only with a bird lure and a worm lure; he's been responding to the worm in these moments I've been describing, while he just stares in boredom at the bird lure like it's a piece of white toast.) I have a mouse lure on the way from Amazon, and we'll see if that's finally the last piece of the puzzle for making HCKEGS time the truly thrilling adventure it should be.

I feel very close to Sunny during these hunting sessions; he only has the courage to go forward when I go with him, as if he's welcomed me into his colony and now understands that I have his back and he has mine. As we silently creep down the dark, twilight-lit hallway of my co-op's third floor, the intimacy of it all really moves me, and I feel so proud to be the guardian of this intelligent, proud, yet sometimes ridiculously goofy creature, and glad that I have the time, money, and energy to make his life healthy, safe, physically vigorous, and intellectually stimulating.

Finally finished the blocking of my couch underside today, after twenty grueling trips up and down from my room to the un-air-conditioned 100-degree attic and back carrying armloads of rare books, which is what I used to fill up most of the space under the couch. I had already put them into long-term storage earlier this year anyway; all the books I'm using are covered in protective mylar sheets; they're all now laying perfectly flat in a completely sunless environment under there; and access to them is blocked at the front by a series of hard plastic storage boxes, which ironically makes the entire thing actually one of the safest ways I could store those books.

As Galaxy says, "Every time you tell a cat no, you have to give him a new yes;" in this case that's my new carrier for him. I've been trying to get him used to its existence first, before I blocked off his cave under my couch; and he indeed is willing to acknowledge it, and has stuck the front half of his body inside to retrieve treats and catnip, although has yet to put his entire body in there and then turn around and lay down. That's okay, though; we're already making progress just four days in, so I suspect a lot of faster movement on this front now that his cave has been sealed off for public safety. (*It's for the kids' sake, Sunny; it's for the kids' sake.*)

Unfortunately, after already asking in our co-op's Discord group four times if anyone on the third floor had an objection to turning Sunny into a roaming house cat, someone finally noticed on the fifth mention, and lodged an objection. So much for that! Human happiness comes first here at the co-op, then afterwards we figure out how to best still get the various pets here what they need. What Sunny needs is a daily dose of exercise, and exposure to new environments; so as one possibility, if I could get him trained on a harness and leash, he could get a much more intense and satisfying opportunity to explore a new environment by taking him out into our yard during the day, or maybe even during twilight with wand toy in hand. Or even before that (or if it doesn't take), I could maybe get a transparent mesh tent for the yard, like one of those big mosquito nets, and he could at least be out in the grass and the sun and with it easy for other housemates to step into the tent for pets and cuddles. That's one of the many nice things about a pet cat, that its needs are just general enough that there are always a number of equally successful ways they can be accomplished.

So, to make it official, here's what's coming up:

Starting Monday will be Sunny's new cat litter, a much more natural clay substance that will be much gentler on both his paws and his butthole. (For now I'm still using the litter S. donated to me, consisting of giant pellets, which is causing Sunny to occasionally scoot his butt along the hardwood floor after a bowel movement, which Google is telling me is the sign of an "irritated anus.") The clay kind I bought is apparently the best kind of litter for a cat, but a particularly hated kind by humans because of also being the messiest, so I'm basically taking on a new commitment of cleanliness around here for the sake of a much more comfortable pooping experience for Sunny. That feels fair to me.

The rest of this week will be devoted exclusively to repeating all our now-established rituals, very tightly and without fail, to get the cat into a good known routine that will make him feel confident and satisfied. (In *Total Cat Mojo*, Galaxy talks about how a cat is at his happiest

when he has confidently established his territory, and feels he has a job to do in that territory [namely, KILL ALL THE MICE].) Housecats have unusually good memories, so he can remember both his genetic routine (basically, to hunt every dawn and twilight), plus the routine of the human he now lives with (where we both go to bed around 10 p.m., then both wake up around 6 a.m.).

I will also be spending the week trying everything I can to start getting Sunny used to and spending time in his new carrier. That's because next week we'll be heading to the animal hospital again for a follow-up visit, where I will also get the cat's weight and microchip status for the first time, and will watch them trim Sunny's nails so that I can learn how to do it myself.

After that will be the challenge of what to do with Sunny for extended periods while I finish up the renovation of my bedroom, which I was in the middle of when this cat first came into my life. I have a little bit of floor refinishing to do; then I need to spackle and sand the walls; then I paint all the walls; then I paint the ceiling; then I assemble the new loft bed. (There's more coming as well, but they're things the cat can be in the room for, like installing a new doorknob, installing sliding closet doors, etc.) I'll likely be doing most of this work on Saturdays or Sundays, and want now to get it finished up as soon as possible, so I need to find people who will let Sunny hang out in their room from 9 to 5 on those days.

I want to get this done as quickly as I can, because afterwards I have a brand-new challenge I didn't have before this cat, which is building a "cat superhighway" in the vertical spaces of my unusually tall 11-foot-high bedroom. If I can pull off what I have in my head at the moment, it will look pretty cool.

That should get us through the winter; and then next spring, when the cat's now been with me for nine months, hopefully has grown very trusting of me, and has come to actually enjoy being taken around in my backpack carrier, we'll try treat-training with a harness and leash for the first time. With any luck, that will be a big new thing for he, I, and other members of the house (especially the three kids who live here, I'm imagining) to do in the warm weather next year, everyone hanging out in the back yard as a group as Sunny gets to experience real grass, sunshine, and nature.

August 9, 2025. A fascinating realization during this morning's HCKEGS session, that Sunny is drooling the entire time we're out doing it. Up to now, I've only seen this drool when I've come back to the room after a full day out working, and have been interpreting that as a sign that he misses me; but this observation this morning is now leading me to the conclusion that he drools whenever he's doing something he really, really loves, and that this thus means I have outside proof that Sunny really, really loves our HCKEGS sessions. I'll keep observing this and report later.

Today was kind of a backwards day for Sunny's schedule, for the first time since I started setting up routines at the beginning of the week; it was a Saturday today, and I was also having a dinner party with some of my housemates tonight, so I ended up spending all day with him in the room but then left right when he's usually expecting me to get home. We had a fun night tonight—my housemate has been talking recently about getting obsessed with these trendy “dry aged” steaks that cost an arm and a leg at steakhouses, but then *Bon Appetit* just put out a video on YouTube two weeks ago about how you can use the Japanese fermented paste known as shio koji to mimic the feel and taste of a dry-aged steak just in a regular home steak cook.

We combined it with a whole steakhouse experience as far as the rest of the meal as well, including homemade pumpernickel bread served with truffle oil, creamed spinach, roasted asparagus, and loaded baked potatoes, then washed it all down with some Spanish red wine. All that plus the great company, and just the good vibes radiating off everyone, made it a superb Saturday night around here. That was then immediately followed by what's become this week my favorite moment of the day, the half-hour where Sunny and I as members of the same tribe go hunting together out in the third-floor hallway for that night's dinner.

We have to wait and do the lure back in my room each morning and night, because for some reason Sunny just will not react to it out in the hallway whatsoever, and I don't know if that's because he's too much on alert for stranger danger, or if it's too obvious in that light that it's just a toy on a stick I'm holding. (Sometimes he attacks the string instead of the lure, and sometimes follows the wand in the air instead of the lure on the ground.) So what our routine has become is about twenty minutes altogether out in the hallway, where he sniffs around and does extended tours in any room that's open, then strolls back to my room, then does another lap again all the way over to the other side of the building, back and forth four or five times.

Then he eventually wanders back into our base camp, aka my bedroom, where I continue keeping all the artificial lights off just like out in the hallway, at which point I get out the wand toy and try to lure him into some hunt-catch-kill cycles to get in some exercise. Today held a surprise, because at one point I accidentally dangled the worm lure up in the air like a bird, and he went totally crazy for it in a way he doesn't when it's on the ground, and interestingly in a way he doesn't when the bird lure is attached and I flutter it in the air in the same way. Galaxy says this is part of the individual personalities of each cat—some prefer only one type of prey size and movement, some are omnivores, and some do a specific regional combination (like mice and lizards in the American Southwest). I could very clearly tonight see for the first time Sunny sink his claws into the lure, bite its neck with his fangs, and shake it a bit to help kill it even faster, which constituted our first “confirmed kill” since he came under my care about two weeks ago now (in fact, two confirmed kills tonight).

Following the usual advice by Galaxy in this situation, the proper thing to do is then feed the cat immediately after a kill, because this most closely mimics what the process is like in the wild. Usually I do that with wet food, and he goes crazy enough anyway; but tonight I had a special treat, in that I had enough steak left over from dinner tonight that I was able to shred it up

into about thirty cat-sized bites. (Don't worry—I Googled the subject beforehand, and experts agree that if it was cooked plainly without a heavy sauce, and if you're not serving it to the cat with things like onions or garlic, it's perfectly healthy to serve your cat your leftovers from your night out at the steakhouse, and in fact most cats will consider it a huge treat.) To give you a comparison, it made up about 25 percent of a typical can of store-bought food I usually feed him for dinner.

And wow, what a surprise I witnessed tonight—turns out plain red meat is so densely nutritious and flavorful that Sunny only ate eight out of the thirty little pieces (constituting just a tiny little fraction of his usual can of food) before he then just licked and nudged around the next three. Then when I opened his main dinner of wet food right after, he didn't even touch it for the first time until a half-hour later. That says something powerful, I think, about how much more nutritious and satisfying pure meat is for a cat than this factory-manufactured, chemically processed stuff we usually feed them, which is why the trendy “raw food diet” is so tempting these days. But you have to be careful with a raw food diet and not just feed the cat red meat you get from a butcher, because a cat actually eats the entirety of the prey they catch and kill, including the organs, guts, blood, bones, skin and all; so this is how they get most of their vitamins and minerals, in a way they don't get with just chunks of meat from the butcher.

So, just the usual store-bought wet food for me, although I'm glad to know I can add in pure meat from the occasional meat dishes I eat around here. (Living in a co-op like I do, I eat mostly a vegan diet now, just like most everyone else here.) And maybe a nice thing to use as treats in future click training; his enthusiasm lasted for eight treats, and my understanding is that a training session rarely lasts longer than eight successful repeats of a behavior, so we'll see.

And then a nice long grooming session over on his bed, a place I try to leave alone to be just his private little sanctuary; it's on the farthest edge of my couch from the door, the closest to the walls, where he organically picked as his main hangout space when he first moved in. Galaxy talks a lot about “putting energy in” to your cat versus “taking energy out;” and petting a cat for too long can often put too much energy in and trigger their fight-or-flight response (Galaxy wisely reminds us in *Total Cat Mojo* that cats have around twenty times more sense receptors in their bodies than we do), so in those situations a cat needs a place where he can wind down without any stimulus at all for a good twenty or thirty minutes until he's his happy calm self again. Galaxy says that anytime a cat deliberately turns its back to you when sitting down, assume at first that it's overstimulated and it's signaling to you that it needs a little time to itself; and Sunny often sits down with his back to me when on his bed, which is why I try to leave that as his private space where he can be alone and untouched, so he won't go running off to the back corner of my closet for that privacy instead.

I have to say, I'm very, *very* satisfied with this HCKEGS routine Galaxy teaches in his books and videos; it's worked like magic on Sunny, follows the exact pattern and for the exact amounts of time Galaxy predicted it would, and makes me feel really close to him as we hunt together in the top floor of my five-story, 125-year-old building. It feels like a great way to feed him too, like he's really earning his breakfast and dinner, putting in enough exercise to burn each meal off, and regulating his diet in a way free-grazing dry food all day wouldn't at all. I've got my second major shipment of cat things from Amazon on its way now, to get him even more into wild cat mode, including my first six-foot-tall cat tree jungle gym, seeds for growing my own catgrass and catnip, and more; but more on all that tomorrow.

August 10, 2025. A fascinating observation after this morning's hunting session; when I tried to feed Sunny the leftover steak from last night as a reward for his confirmed kill, he took one sniff of it and then completely ignored it. This lends a huge amount of credence to something Galaxy talks about, that if you're going to feed pure red meat to a cat, it has to be under circumstances as close as possible to it killing live prey and eating it (in other words, fresh and warm). In particular, it's been observed that when cats in the wild come across kills that have been dead for a while, they deliberately avoid it, because they instinctually know that putrefied flesh equals disease, and disease equals death. When Sunny ate the steak last night, it was less than two hours after that steak being raw meat, and of course it was still warm from having just come from the human dinner party; twelve hours later, after already starting to take on that gamey smell that meat does when it's been left out a little too long, Sunny avoided it like the black death, because this is literally what diseased meat can cause in an animal.

So as briefly mentioned yesterday, I've made a pretty major decision about the room renovation I had been in the middle of when Sunny first came into my life two weeks ago, and have decided to just put off the room's painting all the way until next summer. The simple fact is that, with it still only having been two weeks that Sunny's been in a stable environment, and a relationship with me that's quickly growing but still isn't at "trust you with my life" mode, it would be a significant challenge to be packing him into his carrier every Saturday and leaving him in someone else's room for eight hours while I painted. I don't know if it will be any easier another nine months from now, after he's gotten a lot more comfortable with both his surroundings and his carrier, but absolutely for a fact I can state that the chances will at least be higher.

So for now I'm concentrating on the things I can finish while he's in the room, such as installing my new closet doors, buying and assembling my new furniture, etc. That means I've already jumped at this point to immediately starting to think about how to better "catify" the room to make it less tedious for him during the day; now that I've had a housemate explicitly state that he doesn't want the cat roaming around the hallways when I'm not there, it's up to me to give him enough stimulus in the eight hours every day he spends alone that we don't see the development of any behavioral issues. So on this second major order from Amazon yesterday, I bought my first cat tree, six feet high and that (I checked) fits very neatly in the small space in front of my diagonal window, between my couch on one side and my floor-model AC on the other.

I also bought seeds for catgrass and catnip, because Galaxy is always talking about how cats' brains are still hardwired for wild outdoor living, so the more of the outside you can bring indoors for him, the better. Finally, I bought a bird feeder to hang right outside my window, which will be at the exact same level of the tree's highest perch. We'll see what happens when Sunny can finally get way high up and sit directly next to the window, has lots of activity to watch during his daily "cat TV," and has grass to chew on during the day when I'm not around. (For what it's worth, I also bought a click trainer with this order, because I'm simply too curious and want to get started with it right away.)

I've also decided today to start a brand-new ritual just for myself, which is to devote every Sunday morning from now on to a deep clean of my bedroom, because I've been able to easily see this week how much of a nightmare this room would become if I don't. Something Galaxy says about this that's really struck me is that we're really lucky cats are so naturally fastidious and clean, which they do instinctually in order to keep the scent of prey off them and

thus not attract bigger predators, and that these cats deserve to have us match this level of fastidiousness so that they're not constantly having to stew in their own hair and filth.

As part of this particular week's clean, I also finally dumped the last of the pellet-style cat litter Sony loaned me two weeks ago, and replaced it with natural clay, which is a whole lot better for your cat but also makes a bigger mess, which is why so many people avoid it. So, this is another reason to start a new ritual of Sunday-morning deep cleans, because I know in advance that Sunny is going to track that clay all over the room. How do I know Sunny likes the new litter? Because before I could even put the box back into the closet, he immediately ran over to it, dug around in it enthusiastically, then proceeded to take a dump six inches away from where I was sitting, right in the middle of the room. This is yet something else Galaxy talks about, that this whole concept that "cats need privacy" when pooping is 100 percent complete and total made-up nonsense, created entirely by humans because: 1) that's how *we* think of pooping; and 2) it provides an excuse to keep the litter box in the garage with a top on it for our own convenience. Galaxy recommends leaving the top off, and keeping the box in the cat's base camp (easy in my case, since the cat lives his entire life in one room).

And a huge breakthrough today as well; for the first time since getting it five days ago, today I watched Sunny get all the way inside his new carrier voluntarily, then lay down. That's big, and I was very excited to see it happen. I don't think it's a coincidence at all that this happened exactly two days after blocking off his cave underneath my couch. Just a few hours later, I observed him now starting to rub along the sides and edges of it, which I now know from Galaxy's book is a cat marking the object with its scent as a declaration of it being part of its territory, something the cat likes and wants to keep other cats away from. That's another great sign, that he's starting to think of it as a part of "his things," a safe nest he wants to keep other cats away from.

I've been meaning to mention, by the way, that after two weeks of guardianship, I can now state for a fact that it's not just that he's nervous, but that Sunny has no interest at all in being a lapcat in any way; in fact, even if I place him on my lap, he just immediately stands up and walks away. Who knows what happened to him in the years before me that made him develop this attitude? I suspect this is strongly related to the fact that he doesn't like getting in my bed either. On weekend days like today, when I spend a lot of morning and afternoon time with him, I've discovered that he largely just likes to go lie on his bed and do his own thing, which works out really well for both of us.

I was eating a butter croissant earlier, and as always Sunny was fixated on trying to take a bite of my human food, and as always I was keeping it away from him; but he ended up getting in a few licks of the buttery surface, and I thought, "Oh well, how much harm can a few licks of butter cause?" But sure enough, a half-hour later, *blam*, a big ol' vomit right in the middle of my floor; and I've been with him all day, so I know that there hasn't been even a single new detail about his day whatsoever other than those couple of licks he got in. So there, that's how much harm a few licks of butter can cause. (Further research later revealed another myth about cats; although they can drink milk when kittens, adult cats are completely and totally lactose-intolerant.) One of the side effects of being a cat's guardian is that it's made me a better human, too, by necessity; I can no longer eat in my room, I can no longer leave dirty plates or glasses in my room, I can no longer get high in my room (which means the total amount I'm high has gone way down in the last two weeks), and if I get angry at something online and start

ranting and raving out loud, the cat immediately picks up on the vibe and becomes convinced our entire tribe is being threatened.

Ha ha ha! Sunny's been nervous about making the series of jumps up to the top of my bookcases, but I coaxed him all the way up today. Once he was finally on top of the tallest object in the room for the first time since moving in, looking down on all the proceedings below, he began drooling from pleasure!

August 11, 2025. Finally got some double-sided tape and aluminum foil from Target yesterday, so applied the tape to the couch arm and the foil to the top of my AC. Sunny unfortunately went a bit ballistic while I did it, making manic dashes (or “zoomies”) back and forth three or four times between his litter box and his bed (located in the exact opposite corners of my room), then eventually squeezing himself under one of my tables in a space I didn’t even realize he could fit in. He clearly saw the application of the tape as a threat to his territory; but he was already regularly scratching the scratching post next to the couch arm even before the tape, so I will trust Galaxy when he says to suck up whatever guilt you might feel about a cat reacting badly at first at implementing a “no,” and remind yourself that the new “yes” will have the cat feeling just fine in a little bit.

Not a lot to report today, because I had to spend most of the day out of my room. H. is now back from a recent trip, and has decided to start leaving her door open during Sunny and I’s twilight hunting sessions. He loved it! This is the first brand-new space he’s had to explore in over a week, and he examined every single freaking inch of it, his tail low but the very tip slowly swinging back and forth, which Galaxy says is a sign that the cat is currently at its most curious and exploratory, using all the extra sense receptors it has in its tail (a cat’s tail tip is as sensitive to touch as our fingertips are) to get a 360-degree understanding of the world around him. I also love how much this gives Sunny an excuse to claim yet more territory on the third floor; Galaxy talks about this at length in *Total Cat Mojo*, about how a housecat is always in the process of marking off spaces as “theirs” so that their imaginary enemies know to back off, and how they’re at their happiest and most secure when they have a good wide area to claim as their territory, which is typically an entire house with most families but is just certain rooms and the hallway of my co-op’s third floor with mine. (For urban outdoor cats, this is typically a full ten city blocks!)

Of course, today’s exploration also highlighted why Sunny can’t just be left to wander on his own, either; I had to play defense the whole time against him jumping up on a dresser that had plants (where he really wanted to go), and a table with various food items on it (where he *really* wanted to go). My housemates could always take special measures to catproof their room on a limited basis when they’re expecting Sunny to come over and play with them for a couple of hours; but something I’m only now realizing is going to be a problem with trying to turn him into a roaming third-floor house cat is that none of us always keep our rooms “cat-level spotless” unless we have to, which means that most of the rooms would be problematic for Sunny to be in unsupervised.

So, our half-hour to one hour each day of exploring, split among three sessions, has to be done with my constant supervision; but I don’t mind, in that it’s very akin to walking a dog in terms of commitment level you’re making towards your pet. I like that half-hour to one hour of exploring together, hunting for prey together, watching Sunny getting scared and then getting courageous again in an endless cycle. That’s the whole reason to own a cat, for those times of fun play and deep bonding you get to have with them, so why would anyone want to skip that?

Our first thunderstorm together this evening, which was a delight. The cat was so endlessly fascinated with everything going on outside my window, which sits low to the ground so that he can just hop right over to it from the couch—the lightning, the thunder, the patter of the rain against the window, he was entranced with it all, his eyes so dilated he might as well have been on LSD. A really solid sign that I need to get some more stimulus for this poor cat; he responds so well to it, even if he is wary and scared at first.

August 12, 2025. After installing my “no”s yesterday (double-sided tape on the couch arm, aluminum foil on top of my AC), I was really curious this morning to see how Sunny reacted to them in the middle of the night while I was asleep. I’m happy to report that all the tape was still on the couch, unmolested, and that the foil was still on top of the AC despite not being taped down. I found exactly one and only one claw mark on top, which makes me strongly believe he jumped up once and found the foil so unpleasant that he avoided it the rest of the night. (Don’t forget that there have been two new yeses in these spots for about a week as well—a scratching post right next to the couch arm, and a folding table the exact height of the AC right next to it.)

I have to admit that I’m second-guessing myself a lot these days about whether I’m feeding Sunny enough food; currently I’m giving him two three-ounce cans of wet food per day (around 7:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m.), which equals 160 calories, and cats in the wild typically eat between 150 and 300 calories per day, so I’m on the very low end. I also have been worried about whether he’s getting enough liquids, because I still just barely ever see him use his water fountain, and that’s while still being highly nervous about it and always approaching it with caution. Galaxy recommends in these situations being a “cetective,” a cute term for basically examining all the physical evidence you have at your disposal, then trying to make deductive conclusions based on it.

When it comes to that, the simple fact is that Sunny never completely wolfs down all his food the moment he gets it, which is usually a big sign that a cat isn’t getting enough food; he instead only eats around half of it, then eats the other half in two more sessions of about another half-hour apiece. (In other words, he’s behaving exactly like a cat in the wild would in terms of catching “three mice” in the morning and another three in the evening; and that tracks almost exactly with the fact that most cats in the wild eat somewhere between five and ten mice a day.) So all this leads me to believe that his food intake is perfectly fine, even if it is on the low end (which I figure is the better default for a sedentary indoor cat than a default on the high end). He has a vet appointment next week, so we’ll discover the true answer soon.

Then now that I’m using clay cat litter which clumps up after a pee (and because I empty the litter box every morning), I also know for a fact that Sunny is urinating two to three times every day; and that seems like simply too much pee if the cat wasn’t getting enough liquids. So, mind reassured for now, although when you’re a cat guardian, I’ve discovered that you have a low-level worry about these things all the time, which is why it’s so critically important to become an expert witness of your cat’s behavior, so that you’ll know when it’s off.

Every day that we have a twilight hunting session, Sunny is becoming bolder and bolder, and more and more vigorous. I suspect that’s partly because of starting to do it every day in a row now for a week, and partly because of finally getting good balanced nutrition in who knows how long. As far as we can tell, his former owner was just occasionally feeding him tins of gourmet smoked salmon for human consumption that she was stealing from a housemate from the communal fridge in the middle of the night, and it looks like nothing else, because we found no commercial cat food in the room at all when we first took over his care. I don’t feel angry with her, because she was ill at the time and didn’t realize what she was doing; but nonetheless, I feel deep compassion for Sunny for having to go through that. One thing I’ve noticed in my now two and a half weeks with him is that he’s very finely tuned in to the human emotions going on in the room with him; whenever I spend too much time online and start ranting and raving out loud about something, he’ll get visibly upset himself, so who knows how much trauma he’s carrying around from whatever kind of behavior for who knows how long by his former owner.

He's coming out of his shell more and more these days, turning back into the spritely cat he's supposed to be, and it's a real pleasure to watch it unfold.

August 13, 2025. My mouse lures for my wand toy finally arrived (one gray, one white), and...wow. Turns out my hunch was exactly correct, that Sunny's particular unique personality is to go for mice as prey and nothing else. In fact, before I could even get the stupid thing hooked to my line, the cat was already in my lap, jumping and pawing at it while I held it in my hand; then once I did get it on and it began wriggling around the room, Sunny for the first time in the three weeks I've known him displayed the energy of a kitten, at points literally leaping up into the air, jumping on and off and around the couch, and ready to continue hunting for easily three times as long as I've ever gotten him to do it with either the lizard or the bird feathers.

Also, turns out having a mouse as a lure is great from a physics standpoint too. Sunny would go the most nuts whenever I would make the mouse suddenly jump into the air a little bit, just like how actual mice do in the wild when startled; and once he would finally get his claws into it and I would pull on the string, once released the lure would go shooting all the way across the room, which also would make Sunny nuts, also because I'm sure this is how real mice scamper off after being briefly held, too. After having no more on past nights than three "confirmed kills" (which is anytime I personally witness Sunny go through the hyper-efficient three-step killing process cats' brains have developed over thousands of years—first grabbing the lure with his claws, then sinking his fangs into the jugular cord, then shaking it violently), tonight he had eight or nine, which would be a very good twilight hunting session indeed on a farm. Even better, a few times after a kill, he would literally pick up the mouse with his teeth and carry it off across the room, me and the wand toy following close behind.

And a big new stimulus as well during tonight's pre-hunt prowls around his territory. Turns out my temporarily homeless housemate L. is hopping from one empty bedroom to another until her own fall lease finally starts, so she's staying in A.'s room while A. is in Europe, which Sunny found out for the first time tonight. It's so funny to watch him react in those situations, because it's just like a human toddler; he's terrified at first and bolts, but then a moment later creeps up to the first bend in our hallway and peers around it at the new "stranger danger," then tries and fails again but only runs halfway back this time, then on the third or fourth try finally reaches the bedroom itself, where he can tell that L. (getting ready for an evening out) is not a threat.

This is always very exciting to me, when Sunny has a chance to have some big exciting new things happen to him, and when he burns off a lot of energy and gets to put in some exercise; because since one of my floormates has objected to the idea of Sunny becoming a roaming "house cat" for the third floor, he has to spend 23 hours a day in my room, and I'm typically the one and only human he sees and interacts with as well. That has him on the edge of a behavioral problem called separation anxiety, which if it gets worse might result in incessant mewling all day when I'm not there, peeing in inappropriate spots, and shredding my belongings; and how that's fixed is by providing him as much new unique stimulus every day as I can, and by getting him to hang out with as many different people as possible.

This subject will take a big turn if I can train him into seeing his carrier as a place of safety and comfort, so that he'll happily go along on little adventures with me; that would let me easily take him to other people's rooms for playdates, for example, or out to the yard. For now, though, I have things like the new six-foot-high cat tree for my window, which also arrived yesterday and that Sunny is slowly getting used to having in his territory (he's tread the first level now, but only because it's the same exact height as both my couch and my windowsill, but he hasn't gotten up the courage yet to explore any of the three higher levels). And tomorrow I

finally start my crops of catgrass and catnip; my friend Carrie has grown both in the past for her own cats, and there are few more delightful things over at Carrie's place than attending a dinner party on her back porch and watching the cats come out to roll around in the catnip all high. Unfortunately I haven't seen a single bird come by the bird feeder, but maybe that will eventually pay off too. So all these things added together, plus my coming loft bed and some cat steps to get up and down from that, I hope will provide Sunny with as much "intellectual stimulation" as possible, while I get him more and more used to making short trips in the carrier.

And a final observation to make about tonight's unusually vigorous prey-play session; for the first time since I started his current diet two weeks ago, tonight he did actually immediately wolf down an entire can of wet food all in one big session, when usually he will only eat about half. That's clearly a sign that he burned off a lot of energy today, so he earned the right to a third can of wet food tonight, which I gave him around 10 p.m. when he typically next starts whining about wanting to go out again.

In fact, it wasn't a hard decision to make this a permanent arrangement, that every time he has this vigorous a play session, I'll give him a third three-ounce can of wet food; right now he's getting 160 calories a day, which is on the low end of the 150-300 cats get in the wild, and officially under the minimum 200 calories of most housecats, so an increase to 240 calories on extra-vigorous days is still well within the middle of both statistics. I'm just immensely pleased he's getting in that kind of exercise in the first place.

August 14, 2025. True to my prediction, Sunny was once again kitten-level nuts this morning for his new mouse lure (it's a true pleasure to watch this cat jump straight into the air out of excitement over his coming kill), so I've made the decision to permanently increase his caloric intake from 160 per day (two three-ounce cans of wet food, or six ounces per day) to 240 (three cans, or nine ounces), because he's now expending enough energy every day to justify it. (To make it official, just so I can keep track, that's now \$3 in food per day Sunny is eating with this first brand.) But I don't want him to get into the habit of expecting that third can in the middle of the day, because that would present problems in the future both to me and catsitters, so instead I'm now feeding him one and a half cans twice a day, at his usual 7:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m.

My contact at Hyde Park Cats wrote today, to let me know that the animal hospital had some questions in advance for our follow-up appointment soon; apparently they still have HPC down as the contact, since they were the ones who set up the initial consultation for me. I got her all caught up with the last two weeks, and shared lots of photos, and she seemed very touched and moved by the entire story. And I have to admit, the entire first week I started caring for Sunny in my room, I cried at least once each evening, thinking about what a delicate little creature this innocent cat is, and how its light was almost snuffed out a few weeks ago against its will, like a prisoner in a cage who all the guards have forgotten about. I don't pretend otherwise—I did a very noble thing by saving this cat's life, which I know because I wouldn't have spent \$1,200 of my hard-earned money on it otherwise.

Yet another breakthrough in our twilight HCKEGS sessions at dinner; for the very first time, I got him not only to respond to the lure while out in the hallway, but to dance and prance all over the place while we were out there. Chalk it up to these new mouse lures! I used the gray one tonight, which is difficult for me to see in the twilight against the dark carpets and floors of the natural light with no artificial lamps on; but as Galaxy explains in *Total Cat Mojo*, cats actually see a bit worse than us in bright daylight, so that they can see a whole lot better at times like sunset, and he could pick that mouse out with crystal-clear precision against the carpet that's almost the exact same color and shade.

Of course, I also saw that awareness of being in the middle of the food chain that Galaxy talks about; so anytime the mouse got too close to the east side of the U-shaped hallway, where the only other bedroom besides mine was open tonight, he would eventually forget about the mouse because he was too busy eyeing that doorway warily. But once I got him turned around away from that open door, he was back in hunter mode, and would do really well again until it was time to turn him and see once more if he'd head any closer towards the door.

This is one of the big points I've wanted to get to from the start; if I can get him prey-playing regularly in the hallway with the wand toy, that gives us a lot more room to stretch out and run, jump, and go nuts, while also opening the door to perhaps other people in the house getting this opportunity to play with him too. In the last five years, if any of my housemates had said, "Oh, I got this rescue cat today, and I want him to get as much exposure to as many different people as he can, so that you get all the pets and cuddles but have none of the responsibility," I would've said, "Sign me up for ten hours a week, please!" I'm kind of surprised so few people have taken me up on this offer, which I've made multiple times now; so if I can get him normalized to prey-playing in the hallway, maybe that can shift to other wand holders, and people can get so charmed by him that they'll naturally want to have him in their room for maybe an hour or two here and there.

Carrie has taken to calling me "Crazy Cat Gentleman," and while I see the humor in that, I'm not sure how much I agree with the sentiment. Ultimately, I'm not one of those people who

carry their cat upside-down like a baby and say things like, “I wuv my widdle Mister Wuggums, isn’t that right, my Wuggums, my wiggy-woogy-woo-woo-woo-Wuggums! And I feed my widdle Mr. Wuggums fresh raw meat each day from a chicken I kill in the back yard myself, ISN’T THAT RIGHT, MR. WUGGUMS, MR. WUG-WUG-WIGGY-WIGGY-WUG WUGGUMS!!!” All the things I do, and all the things I buy, are for specific purposes, aimed to either elicit certain behavior (like getting him to voluntarily get into his carrier without a fuss) or avoid certain behavior (like peeing on random things, tearing things up when I’m not here, etc.). I enjoy Sunny’s company and he enjoys mine, but we’re more like two buddies than we are joined at the hip. He sidles up to me and snuggles for a certain amount of the day, but then he’s off doing his own thing (usually grooming or sleeping) for other large parts of the day, even when it’s a Saturday and I’m there with him all day; then he and I come together every sunrise and sunset as a united tribe to go out hunting, catching, and killing, while also reinforcing our territorial boundaries with our scent. Then again, maybe that *is* the definition of “Crazy Cat Gentleman,” so what do I know?

August 15, 2025. Today I began a 24-pack of Costco's Kirkland Signature grain-free salmon wet food (donated to me by a housemate; typically \$1 per three-ounce can, or \$3 per day). After two and a half weeks of observations now, I can not only confirm that Sunny's two main moments of activity each day are at sunrise and sunset, like Galaxy talks about in *Total Cat Mojo*, but I even now know what the specific timeframe is that Sunny feels the urge to go hunting, because he always starts getting antsy right around 6:00 (both a.m. and p.m.), which then culminates with us finally going hunting and feeding at almost exactly 7:30. This is the one and only time the cat will hang out in my bed with me, specifically for the purpose of trying to get me up and going (interestingly, for being such an affectionate cat, he entirely shuns being petted whenever it's hunting time), so thankfully for me I'm an early riser, so I just happen to be waking up myself right when the cat starts bugging me each morning. It's the closest Sunny gets to being legitimately annoying, for although he does it gently with his claws retracted, he does spend pretty much the entirety of the hour between 6:00 and 7:00 pawing me on the nose and lips, trying whatever he can to get me to get up, open my door, and let him out into the hallway to go hunting.

It would be easy to interpret all this in a negative light, if you didn't know the real reason cats do this, so it doesn't surprise me to see so many people talk about how their cat "goes crazy" in the dawn hours (when it's actually being very methodical), or "relentlessly begs to be petted" (which is not what it's actually seeking). Sunny's behavior is much more tolerable to me now that I know the reason behind it, which is a powerful reminder of how important it is as a pet owner to understand your pet as much as possible, so that you stop ascribing human reasons to their actions and keep making both yourself and them miserable. Scratching the furniture is another action that falls under this subject, because in reality a cat scratching their owner's furniture is actually the highest compliment a cat can pay you, in that what they're saying is that they love and trust you so much, they've now inducted you into their tribe/colony, and the first thing that happens in those situations is that the cat tries to mingle together your scent and theirs on every object within its territory, so that other cats wandering by understand what exact tribe owns that territory and who exactly is in that tribe.

I'm still making my way through the eleven seasons of Galaxy's first cable show, *My Cat From Hell*, and I'm kind of shocked at how many people on that show say things like, "My cat scratches up my furniture because he's mad at me for something I did earlier, and now is enacting revenge," seemingly not understanding that a simplistic, instinct-driven creature like a cat is incapable of advanced human intellectual concepts like "being offended" and "wanting revenge." Scratching is actually a desired behavior, because it proves the cat is feeling very stable and secure in his home, so the goal is not to stop it but rather to redirect it to a more appropriate object like a scratching post, using Galaxy's "no/yes" method. I now have a very functional cat, because I took a week out of my life to learn all about why cats do the things they do, and it just legitimately shocks me that so few other cat owners ever bother to do such a simplistic and helpful thing.

I've been talking a lot in this journal about the "hunt-catch-kill-eat" of HCKEGS; but as I sit here tonight, typing this while watching Sunny sleep on his bed about three feet away from me on my couch, I'm reminded of how important I've discovered the "groom" and "sleep" part of that cycle is too. We've now hit something like day ten in a row of doing our nightly prowling sessions and then hunting session, so I've gotten lots of opportunities to see how Sunny behaves afterwards, and without fail he goes straight into a very extended grooming session over on his bed, perhaps comes over and cuddles just a little bit more, then conks out like the dead starting

around 8:30 or so. (Galaxy says that when a cat does prey-play with us, they're actually expending a tremendous amount of energy for their tiny little bodies, the equivalent of a competitive athlete sprinting at full speed for an hour straight, and that they essentially sleep the rest of the day in order to build up the energy for the next hunting session.)

He does these things on his bed for a very specific reason, the whole reason I got the bed in the first place, which is because I treat the bed as a "human-free zone" whenever he's on it, a private place yet out in public where he can just chill, groom himself, and sleep without having to worry about grubby little human hands being all over him all the time. Let's not forget, cats have literally twenty times the amount of sense receptors in their bodies as humans do, so they're always at risk of what Galaxy calls overstimulation; that's when they can't help themselves and just lay around getting petted over and over, but it's eventually too much for all those millions of sense receptors, at which point the cat either devolves into a fight response (suddenly giving you a good whack with the claws) or a flight response (hiding from you under the couch or in the closet).

What the cat is craving in those moments is fifteen or twenty minutes to decompress and desensitize; so if you create a safe no-human zone out in a public area of your room, he'll just go there for those fifteen or twenty minutes, then come back over and start loving you again with no additional drama. Galaxy says that there are certain triggers you can look for that signal a cat is starting to get overstimulated, and in fact I see these behaviors all the time from Sunny; sometimes he'll still sit next to me but suddenly sit with his back to me, or sometimes his back legs will try kicking my arm away even as his front legs are hugging my arm and keeping it close. (An important thing to remember here is that the cat actually likes the sensation of being petted, just that it becomes overwhelming to his nerve receptors at a certain point, which explains a lot of the "love love love love ATTACK" behavior behind overstimulation.)

I have to admit, I really deeply love these moments, where I'm sitting here chilling on my computer, writing or watching videos, while Sunny is also chilling about three feet away from me on his bed, sleeping or grooming or watching "cat TV" (i.e. looking out my bedroom window). I'm really moved in those moments by the feeling of us being peers, companions, able to enjoy being in a room together without needing to constantly be rubbing up against the other. That's one of the things I've come to appreciate about cats as I've gotten older, that they have their own rich inner life going on that we're not a part of at all, an instinctual wild-cat world of scents and territory, grooming and exploring, building up energy all day in order to viciously attack over and over at twilight.

I didn't appreciate until after reading Galaxy's *Total Cat Mojo* that cats were not actually domesticated into indoor animals until the late 1800s, while we've been keeping dogs as domesticated pets for five thousand years now. That's led to a tremendous amount of specialty dog breeding over the millennia, to make them more and more loyal, more and more obedient, more and more happy to please humans; but the cats currently in our homes continue to share 96 percent of the DNA of the wild cats they used to be ten thousand years ago, meaning that they're largely their own masters and we merely get the privilege of being a part of their lives. That's why I've found myself responding so passionately to Galaxy's entreaty to duplicate the sunrise and sunset HCKEGS cycle that's baked deeply into a cat's brain, because I love that I'm tapping into that ancient wild instinct, one that makes Sunny so confident and happy both during it and once it's over. It's a real privilege to see him conk out so soundly here on his bed three feet away,

after a full day of multiple play sessions and extended prowls throughout my co-op's third floor, and I feel lucky that I get to share the moment with him.

August 16, 2025. An interesting development last night; for the very first time, the cat spent a bit of time in bed with me not for the purpose of trying to get me to get up, but rather to sleep while curled up against me. This once again has me thinking about what kind of experience he had with his previous owner, which is something N. was mentioning as well the other day; we have no way of knowing how long he was with his previous owner, how long his previous owner was mentally ill, how this might have affected the way she treated Sunny, what kinds of traumas Sunny has because of it, or even if there were any previous owners before her and if maybe they treated Sunny even worse.

For another great example, Sunny's obsessive avoidance of laps, I'm coming to realize, is beyond just a normal quirk and approaches pathological. Even when he's at his most relaxed and happy and starts his instinctual kneading (which kittens do to their mother's breast to activate it to start producing milk; whenever an adult cat kneads you, it means you've made them so comfortable and secure that you've literally transported them back to childhood), instead of kneading my lap or belly like most cats, he literally lays on his back and kneads the air. Intuitively, that doesn't feel like organic behavior, but rather something he learned when younger, possibly by being swatted away every time he tried kneading the belly of a previous owner. If that's the case, then last night feels like a big emotional breakthrough, the result of an (almost) three-week process that's slowly teaching him to "unlearn" some of his protective behavior he developed with a previous owner. Makes me wonder if I'll also see a change to his lap policy over the coming weeks and months.

It's also worth noting for this journal that, after his first day on a brand-new type of food yesterday, Sunny ended up getting sick twice, once in the middle of the day when I wasn't there, and once in the middle of the night when I was asleep. However, there wasn't anything solid in either vomit session, just a bit of bile, so my working theory for the moment is that this is simply his stomach getting used to the new food. (One thing that's become abundantly clear in the last three weeks is that Sunny has a much more sensitive stomach than the average cat, which is how he ended up in the hospital in the first place.) Nonetheless, I'll be keeping a careful watch over this in the coming days.

My housemate M. just got home from an extended summer of ultra-cheap international vacations; and not only was she highly enthusiastic about the idea of spending time with Sunny (just like now A., H., and N. have mentioned), she was the first of them to literally want to go up and hang out with the cat the exact moment we were talking about it, and then this morning literally grabbed her laptop and decided to work out of my room just so the cat would have company. That was really great, and makes me feel for the first time in three weeks that I have an active ally in this house when it comes to the cat's care.

It's worth noting that yesterday was the official end of the sublease Sunny's former owner had here at our co-op, which means we're now no longer legally obligated to let her back in the house. Chicago eviction law, though, says she still has one week past this date to come by and retrieve any of her remaining possessions, so my path to officially owning the cat is still not completely clear and free yet. (If she shows up at the house anytime before the 21st, she has the clear legal right to demand the cat back immediately, and I'd have no other choice but to comply.) So, I'm not quite ready to celebrate yet, although we've at least now at a point where she needs to request we give her Sunny instead of just being able to barge into my room and nab him.

And finally, a few short updates on how the ongoing catification efforts are going. First, I've now walked in a number of times during the day and caught Sunny hanging out and

lounging on the third level of the cat tree (which has a small enclosed felt box for him to hang out in, basically a mini cave), which means it's only a matter of time now before he finally wanders his way up to the level-four perch situated a full six feet from the floor; and second, for the very first time since I installed it, a bird actually visited the bird feeder outside my window while I was there, and Sunny was exactly as riveted as I had hoped he'd be. (Interestingly, he didn't swat the window or try to go after the bird in any way, but simply stared unmoving with his eyes big and wide open.) The weather this week has been as nasty as it gets, so I've been putting off going outside and getting Sunny's first batches of fresh catgrass and catnip going; but I plan on doing that tomorrow, which will add yet another layer of nice catification to my room. The more of the outdoors we can get into that small enclosed space, the better.

August 17, 2025. Another new development around here early this morning; after doing his usual harassing for me to get up beginning around 6 a.m., at a certain point Sunny noticed a natural opening to the comforter I had bundled around me, and he actually burrowed under the cover, turned around, popped his head back out, then proceeded to lay down in the crook of my arm and go to sleep for a while. So maybe his morning mewlings aren't so much about wanting me to get up as it is perhaps him wanting to get into bed with me? Or maybe a little of both? Whatever the case, this is yet more strong evidence that his aversion to beds and laps is learned behavior, not natural behavior, and that we're in the process of watching him slowly "unlearn" it. (I also wanted to briefly note that, on his second day of his new food yesterday, Sunny didn't get sick even a tiny bit; so I think the bile on the first day was merely his sensitive stomach getting used to new food, not that he was having some kind of bad reaction to the food.)

It's Sunday, so it was time for another deep clean of my bedroom! And I gotta say, after all the whining and moaning I saw online from people about how they hate using natural clay cat litter (far and away the best kind of litter for your cat) because "it gets all over the place," after doing a complete sweep of my entire room for the first time in a week, I collected up less than one tablespoon of it out on the floor (although it's worth noting that I also do a small sweep around the box every 24 hours as well, basically every morning as I'm also scooping the latest poop).

This was also my first week of measuring the water beforehand in Sunny's water fountain, so that I would know how much he went through over seven days; and for what it's worth, the fountain holds ten cups of water when full, and seven days later it was down to five cups. Since this water is constantly circulating, I have no idea how much of these five cups is evaporation versus the cat actually drinking it; but I at least have a baseline for comparison now, so that I'll know something is wrong if one Sunday I find eight cups still left, or maybe down to two cups.

One of the things that occurred to me during today's cleaning was that one of the reasons I seem to be handling the daily challenges of the cat better than I was expecting to, and certainly without the constant stress over something going wrong that I've felt in the past over just the concept of getting a pet, is that I now have twelve years under my belt of providing caregiving duties to two elderly parents who both have dementia (or "had" in one case—Dad actually died back in March), and that it turns out there are a lot of similarities sometimes between a cat's behavior and the behavior of an elderly person with dementia. For example—and the reason I was thinking of this today in particular—Sunny gets visibly upset whenever I clean the room, because something new and out of his usual routine is happening, and especially something he considers a threat to his home; he zooms back and forth across the length of my room over and over whenever I clean, wags his tail rapidly like a dog (which, unlike dogs, is a sign that the cat is highly stressed out), and always eventually crams himself into tiny spaces in my room that I didn't even realize he could fit in. But it turns out that people with dementia also respond extremely poorly to any change in their living space's status quo, again because it presents such a threat to the limited way they know about how the world works; and I've gotten very used to that over the last decade of my life, so it doesn't really faze me to see Sunny behaving in the same way, because I know it's temporary and that he'll settle down again once the cleaning is over.

One of the things often talked about when it comes to resilience skills is how a lot of it hinges around three C words—control (applying problem-solving actions to a challenge to make the outcome tilt in your favor), competence (outside proof that your actions worked), and confidence (the emotion you feel in the face of competence, which encourages you to keep doing

it, and to do it better and better). This is absolutely something we can say is having a direct effect on my guardianship of Sunny; every time in the last twelve years I've gained confidence in my ability to solve problems related to my parents' eldercare issues, it's influenced my ability now to see challenges related to Sunny and respond with, "Oh, yeah, okay, I can handle this, no problem," which is a big argument in favor of people practicing their resilience skills as often as they possibly can.

Another big breakthrough this afternoon; for the very first time, Sunny voluntarily sat on my lap for a while, and even settled down into a laying position while pawing my stomach. Granted, it was mostly because he had to—I was working on my computer at the time, and he doesn't like hanging out with me in those situations on the folding table next to my desk I set up for him—but still, given the ongoing aversion he's displayed to laps in general, I'm considering this a big step. It's nice to see the healing regularly continue around here.

August 18, 2025. Some continued extension of Sunny's unlearning early this morning; not only did he get in bed with me again and curl up against my side, this time he did it long enough to briefly fall asleep. (It's also worth noting that he started drooling without me even petting him, which only happens when he's feeling super happy about something.) Unfortunately, though, he also got a bit sick again yesterday, on the third day of his new food; but once again, it happened hours after he ate, and it was only bile with no solid food in it. I don't know what that means, but certainly I'll be officially alarmed if he ends up getting sick a third time.

Not a lot to report today, which is bittersweet—the goal of course is to get everything eventually working like clockwork around here, so that I won't need this journal anymore for meticulously keeping track of every little detail, yet I've really been enjoying writing it, and will be sad to see it come to an end one day. As I sit here writing this tonight, though, with not a lot to talk about, I instead find myself thinking about the concept of territory, and how crucial it is for even a modern cat's 96-percent wild brain to establish a physical area (through scent marking, which is when you see a cat rubbing their face against inanimate objects) that no other cats are allowed to cross, exactly like street gangs in a big city.

My room here at the co-op is 150 square feet, long and narrow; one end of my couch is jammed up against the southern wall, which starts going diagonally to the southwest to accommodate a large picture window, and I have a six-foot-tall cat tree comfortably wedged between them. That basically creates a triangle of roughly four-by-four-by-five feet full of multiple platforms and interesting ways to wind in and out, but with one of the levels basically two feet off the ground and directly connecting up the couch, the cat tree, and the windowsill. From the cat tree he can then go up another four feet in the air if he wants; from the couch he can get up onto the back, which by the end of my room renovation will be the starting point for a series of vertical steps up to my loft bed across the room. It essentially makes this whole side of the room a cat haven, which I hope Sunny will be able to thoroughly declare as his domain in the coming weeks and months.

In so many of the episodes of *My Cat From Hell*, a cat's fear over threats to its territory can sometimes produce just the most outrageous behavior—peeing all over the walls, attacking every single person who visits, meowing all night long—so it's just so crucial to me that Sunny feel as comfortable and secure in this room as possible, both for his sake (he'll be a much happier cat) and my sake (he won't pee all over my stuff). In this sense, my small room is an advantage, because it's feeling very cocoon-like over here by the window these days, a place a cat can really just physically and emotionally own, all the way from the floor to the ceiling.

This is why I also make such an effort to let him get out of the room for a total of about an hour every day, three times spaced throughout the morning, afternoon, and evening, because that way he gets to expand his scent-based territory over the entire third floor. Although there are six rooms and three stairwells he's not allowed into (yet), the spaces open to him cover the entire length and width of the house, so that allows him to establish basically his own Medieval petty fiefdom up here, and feel very secure and stable about being the undisputed king of it all.

And finally, a big surprise to end the night! I'm already sick of being on the constant lookout for spare plastic bags to use as daily morning litter disposal, so I just bit the bullet and bought a whole box of specific litter-designed bags from Amazon, and inside it when I opened it tonight was a cute little stuffed pink mouse toy. I tossed it on the ground, just to see what Sunny would make of it; but lo and behold, instead of the insulted boredom he's greeted literally every other self-propelled toy I've ever introduced to him, here he went absolutely bonkers for an entire half-hour straight, running and jumping and knocking that thing all over the place of his

own volition. Who knew?! So we'll see if his interest can be sustained; but if it can, it adds one more weapon to my arsenal of tools in here for keeping Sunny intellectually stimulated throughout the day.

August 19, 2025. Yet more expansion of Sunny's "bed unlearning" in the early morning hours this morning; he not only got in bed with me again, not only nestled up inside the crook of my arm, and not only fell asleep, but did this four or five times over the course of an entire hour and a half. (It's worth noting as well that he only begins this behavior once he can see I'm awake, which usually happens because of me turning on my phone or laptop for the first time. For the last two days, whenever he sees that light come on, he's in my bed literally ten seconds later.) I don't know if this means that cuddle time in bed is what he's looking for when he nervously paces the room starting around 6:00 every morning, or if the pets and cuddles are merely distracting him from his main desire to get up and start hunting, so I'll keep carefully observing and see if I can glean more information.

Unfortunately, another thing I've noticed is that he had absolutely not the tiniest interest in his wand toy this morning, and that was after only halfheartedly playing with it yesterday; and for the third time in four days, he got sick in the middle of the night (although once again this was hours and hours after he had eaten, and only a little bile came up, nothing solid). I suspect these two things are related, although I don't know if it's because he can't handle the salmon that this latest batch of food is made of (Galaxy claims that most cats don't like to eat anything besides red meat), that he doesn't like this particular brand (it's the in-house generic brand by giant discount wholesaler Costco, which I accepted as a gift from a housemate but would have never bought myself), or if it's simply that his stomach is having a hard time adjusting to a new type of food. That's one of the big things I've learned from *My Cat From Hell*, the danger of making blind guesses about why a cat is acting a certain way, because the human doing the guessing tends to lean in the direction of a human explanation, and thus is almost always wrong. I only have three days left of this particular supply, so I'll probably just stick it out and then never use Kirkland food again.

Today was finally the day for Sunny's follow-up appointment at the animal hospital, the most active day either he or I have had in the last three weeks. My click-training with the new carrier was only somewhat successful, in that once he was in, he largely sat there quietly with his eyes normal (compared to the last time we traveled to the hospital, in which he meowed in a constant stream the entire trip there and back, with his eyes dilated to the point of cartoonishness); but it was still pretty difficult to get him fully inside the carrier for the start of each trip, and it took more grunt-level effort than I had been hoping for. The doctor gave Sunny a clean bill of health; clipped his nails and let me watch, so that I'd know how to do it at home; confirmed that he's been neutered, but let me know that he hasn't been microchipped; weighed him for the first time since I took possession of him (he's exactly ten pounds, which is the exact middle of the average cat); and estimated the cat to be between three and four years old (badly clashing with what his former owner had told all of us when she first moved in, that she had had him for over ten years at that point, kind of definitive proof that she was already having trouble distinguishing reality from fantasy even before she moved into our co-op).

Sunny did only okay afterwards when we got home; although he wasn't unfriendly, he also clearly didn't want to put himself in a position where he could be nabbed by my grubby hands again, and would just sit on my floor and look up at me whenever I tried to get him to come up to the couch for his usual pets and cuddles. That's perfectly understandable, so I decided to just give him his space for winding down from all the chaos, and left him in my room alone until my usual post-work greetings a little past 5 p.m. What was more surprising was how shaky and out of sorts I myself felt after it all, so much so that I decided to just take the second half of the day off, then proceeded to get naughtily high at two in the afternoon and go to a

neighborhood cafe to chill and do some fun stuff. It's a powerful reminder of one of the things that prevented me from adopting a cat for so long, that I have the kind of anxiety issues that typically require an intervention for the person to feel functional (either prescription drugs or, in my case, meditation and mindfulness combined with therapy). Up to now, I've been able to keep that anxiety under control when it comes to Sunny; but man, there's nothing like watching a helpless little creature get all stressed out to make *you* get all stressed out, and I have to admit that I cried a little in relief once we finally got safely home again and Sunny was back in his usual surroundings and calm.

Tried an experiment this evening and got out Sunny's wand toy around 5:30, when he first starts getting restless and meowy, and he was in prime mood to go hunting. Now that I know that he's only three years old, I'm not going to be shy about getting out that wand toy multiple times a day, basically anytime I happen to be in the room and he seems to be in the need to blow off some steam. He's attacked one of the mouse lures so viciously at this point, the tail literally fell off it while we were playing, plus it only has one eye now and in general looks more like a beat-up ball of fur than an actual mouse. I'm impressed with what an efficient hunter he is; he would've been a great farm cat, and if it wasn't so unsafe for him, I'd even let him roam around our attic and be a mouser here too. (Mice are a constant problem here in our five-story, 125-year-old co-op building.)

August 20, 2025. The transformation of Sunny's morning routine seems to be almost complete; this morning he hopped into bed with me right at 5 a.m. (when I usually display the first rumblings of waking), then stayed there sleeping almost entirely until 7:30 when we got up (and with the only pacing and meowing happening in the last half-hour). I've been pleased by this and have encouraged it, despite it making my own morning routine a little more inconvenient. Again, thank God I was already in the habit of waking up myself right around the same time the cat wants to get up!

One thing this is reminding me of that I've been meaning to mention is how my own life is on the most rigid schedule these days since all the way back in high school, which I'm doing specifically to keep the cat happy. This is another way cats are similar to elderly people with dementia, in that it's crucially important in both cases to have a routine full of regular rituals that happen almost exactly the same time every day. Both these types of creatures' days are filled with random chaos they can't control and don't even know is about to happen, so it's important that they have things each day they can count on and know exactly when and how is happening, which ironically creates a sense of control and agency in their lives.

So for the last couple of weeks, every single day without fail I begin the process of waking up around 5 a.m.; get out of bed and start Sunny's morning HCKEGS routine at almost exactly 7:30; get myself ready for the day so that I'm set up with my computer and breakfast in the kitchen around 8:30; check in with Sunny around 12:00 to 1:00, and typically to also let him out for a bit of a prowl (unless I'm too busy at work); wrap up things in the kitchen right around 5:00 p.m. and go back to my room for some pets and cuddles; leave again at 7:00 for group dinner here at the co-op; come back to the room at 7:30 for Sunny's evening HCKEGS routine; then hang out on the couch with him until 10:00 or so, at which point I get into bed. I haven't had this unchanging a schedule in 39 years, and still wouldn't if it wasn't for the cat; but this is one of the sacrifices you make as a pet owner when you want your pet to have as happy and stable a life as possible.

A nice moment this evening; Sunny has finally gotten comfortable enough with the third-floor hallway that he can do a concentrated, extended hunting session with the mouse lure out there, without getting distracted by all the Scary Unknown Stuff. (Once he's nervous about something, I've discovered, there's absolutely no way to distract him—treats and lures do absolutely nothing.) I've been really looking forward to getting to that moment, because now I have an extremely long hallway at my disposal, almost the length of the entire building, to really get him going at a gallop when he's fully tuned in to the hunt. Prey-play is not just about satisfying a cat's instinctual need to hunt and kill; it's about physically wearing them out, not only to get the exercise a healthy cat needs but to inspire it to sleep more deeply through the night, so that you're not constantly dealing with a case of the zoomies at three o'clock every morning. This was in addition to him just schmoozing himself right up against the edge of my body on the couch during our hangout time beforehand, so at peace that he fell asleep for an hour even with my entire arm draped on top of him, plus of course his growing willingness to get into bed with me and sleep there in the early morning as well. I interpret all three of these developments as him getting more and more comfortable around here, feeling more and more safe, and getting up more and more courage to show just what kind of love and intimacy he wants in order to be truly happy. It really melts my heart, I have to admit.

August 21, 2025. Well, for the fourth time since starting his newest brand of food, Sunny was sick in the middle of the night, then threw up a fifth time this afternoon, literally right in front of me as I was doing a little cleaning; so I've now officially decided to throw away the last two days of the Kirkland salmon food immediately. It's also worth noting that I discovered the "cat food" subreddit for the first time this morning, and it's full of cautionary tales from other cat owners about how a lot of cats get sick off seafood-based food, both because of it having high mineral content and because it blocks the absorption of thiamine (i.e. vitamin B1).

Not much else to report today, which is a good sign that this journal is winding down. I did want to note, however, that sparrows are finally starting to regularly come by my bird feeder, which has been tough to get them to do, because I live on the third floor of a building and far away from any trees. Unfortunately, the very top hangout shelf of my six-foot-tall cat tree was often blocking the view for both Sunny and me, so I ended up taking it off today so that we can have a clearer view of the birds. As far as I know, Sunny had never gone up to that top level in the first place, so I figure no big loss, especially since I'm about to assemble my new loft bed which will let him get even higher in the air.

After tonight's very vigorous HCKEGS session, I officially switched to my new 24-pack of Blue Buffalo Tasteful Natural Tender Morsels Chicken Entree, which I'm now buying in 5.5-ounce cans so that I only need one for each meal (\$1.50 per can, or \$3 per day), versus the three-ounce cans where I've been feeding him one and a half containers each meal. Blue Buffalo is known as a premium brand among cat owners who take nutrition seriously, and the change was immediately noticeable; for the first time in the now three brands of food we've tried under my guardianship, Sunny couldn't even wait for me to put the dish down on the floor, but jumped up on the table where I was preparing it and wanted to just start eating out of the metal can immediately. Talk about powerful marketing! I'm taking this as a strong sign that Sunny's extra sensitive digestive system can't handle seafood; but I also acknowledge that since this isn't a laboratory environment where all factors can be isolated and accounted for, it could be that Sunny was reacting to it being cheap generic cat food (literally the in-house brand of Costco), so I will try one of the high-end Blue Buffalo seafood lines in the future to see how he reacts.

August 22, 2025. My friend L. was so moved by my online writing this week about Sunny (which I began publicly talking about starting August 15th, once I was legally allowed to), she bought him a gift certificate to Chewy.com! I decided to use this as an excuse to do something I've wanted to do for several weeks now, which is buy a whole variety of different cat treats so I can try them all out and see which Sunny responds to the best. Galaxy calls this the "Jackpot!" treat, the one the cat finds so irresistible that they'll do literally anything to get it (thus making it a great treat to base training on); and like different types of lures, Galaxy claims that what constitutes a Jackpot! treat changes from one individual cat to the next, one of the few things you can legitimately call a part of a cat's individual personality.

I also bought a bag of ten new mouse lures, because the two I've had for only a week now are already so ripped up as to almost be falling apart (Sunny is a ferocious hunter); sadly, though, these don't come with rings to attach to a wand (they're instead filled with catnip and meant to be a standalone toy for the cat to bat around, and Sunny so far has had very little interest in such toys), so I'm hoping I'll be able to just poke a hole in their noses and attach it to the wand that way. I picked up a spider lure as well, just to see how the cat reacts. (His little brain lights up every time I make the mouse lure crawl vertically up something, like the arm of my couch, which makes me suspect he'll also go for creepy crawly lures, like spiders, centipedes, flies, bees, etc.)

Finally, since I had a chance, I picked up a can of PetSafe SSSCAT, which unlike most cat deterrents is simply a puff of compressed air, with no liquids like a water squirter has (which Galaxy strongly discourages cat owners from using), which can be hooked up to a motion detector so that it puffs out some air every time the cat walks in front of it. I bought this primarily to put in front of A.'s plants during our thrice-daily prowls around the third floor, because the cat is obsessed with chewing on them (it's literally the first thing he runs straight to, every time I let him out of my room), and it'd be nice to have an automatic deterrent for that, instead of me having to manually steer him away from the plants multiple times every day. We'll see whether it works or not.

One thing I noticed at the animal hospital the other day is that it's so much easier to get Sunny into his carrier when it's oriented vertically, so that I can essentially just pour him in, versus the horizontal position I usually keep it in at home, which lets him casually walk in and out of it but also lets him really dig in and fight if you try to force him in. So, today I tried a little experiment to see if I could keep the carrier vertical in my room and still convince him to go in for his usual treat (Wellness Natural's Whimzees), which typically he goes nuts for. (In fact, he can even remember the approximate times of day now we do treat-training [early afternoon and late evening, when he's at his hungriest], and will already start getting excited anytime I walk close to my closet in that time period, where I store his treats.) But vertically? No way, no how, buddy! He obviously still has that vertical position in his mind from the trip the other day, because when I tried putting his beloved treat in there in that position, he simply gave me a look of withering disdain, as if to say, "Did you really think you were going to trick me again that easily?" We'll see if maybe time and finally finding his Jackpot! treat will eventually do the trick.

I've been very pleased to discover Sunny lounging inside the felt box at the top of his cat tree most of the times I now come in unannounced during short periods of the day. It's basically replaced him using his carrier as a cave, but I still leave the carrier out (on the floor between the two bases of the cat tree), so that he'll at least continue thinking of it as a regular piece of furniture and part of "his property," even if he's not necessarily lounging around inside of it like I

would prefer in a perfect world. I don't mind him using the cave in the cat tree instead—I paid a lot of money for that stupid thing, so I'm relieved to see him actually using it every day—and I can especially understand the appeal of the walls being made out of felt and sitting in a place that gets direct sunlight half the day (my window is on a diagonal wall that faces southwest), so that the box gets nice and toasty warm during the day. Who can turn that down?

August 23, 2025. An extremely routine Saturday around here today, with almost nothing new to report. About the only interesting thing to convey is that a group of sparrows have finally discovered my bird feeder, up on the third floor of my building and far away from any trees, and that Sunny finds it exactly as mesmerizing as I had hoped he would. I'm really glad this thing is finally starting to pay off; it gives him lots of interesting things to watch on his "cat TV" while I'm not here. (According to Galaxy, far and away what our cats spend the most time doing while we're at work is not actually sleep, but rather stare out the windows.) It's also worth noting that, three days now into his Blue Buffalo food, he continues to lick his plate entirely clean at the ends of meals (although to be clear, he still only eats about half the food when it's first put out, then another 25 percent about a half hour later, then the final 25 percent a half hour after that), and to pace in a circle around me as I first put the can of food onto his plate in the first place. This is the first of his three brands of food now that he's reacted this way to, but it's also the most expensive brand out of the three, so I think it's safe to assume a direct correlation there.

August 24, 2025. A growing realization that especially hit me here on a Sunday, when I'm spending the entire day with Sunny in my room while playing around on my computer; anytime he starts getting restless, pacing around my desk, and especially jumping on my computer and creating havoc (how can a cat manage to open eight apps and change all their settings just from the act of walking over a keyboard? *And how come I can't do that?*), I can usually get him calm and settled again after a good fifteen minutes or so of hard prey-play with the mouse lure around the room. At three years old, which is like a teenager in human years, I've discovered that Sunny has an almost unlimited amount of energy in him right now, and I'm pretty sure I could get him to chase mice six or seven times a day, if I ever wanted to devote enough of my life to doing prey-play six or seven times a day.

As it is, I do it three times a day, almost every single day (sunup, sundown, and right after lunch on the days I'm home), plus in recent days have often been adding it at 5 p.m. right after I get "home" (from working in my co-op's kitchen all day), or sometimes 10 p.m. right before going to bed, or sometimes like today on Sunday around 3 p.m. just because he's bugging the crap out of me. There are absolutely no negatives here, other than a bit of my personal time being eaten up; otherwise, doing prey-play anytime the cat wants helps keep them exercised and healthy, taps into their ancient wild cat DNA, wears them out so they'll sleep more soundly at night, gives them intellectual stimulation, and provides a deeply bonding (and often hilariously adorable) moment between cat and guardian.

And speaking of intellectual stimulation, our neighborhood sparrows have finally caught on for good that there's a bird feeder up here on the third floor, far away from any trees, and are now coming by every few minutes all day long. What a boon for Sunny! He's captivated by the birds, every single time they show up, and he'll stop whatever he's doing whenever he notices one visiting again, then rush over to the windowsill so he can stare with wide-eyed wonder from three vertical feet away. (For some reason he won't go up to the top level of his cat tree, where he would be nose-to-nose with the birds; every time, he's content with sitting on the windowsill below and looking up.)

There are two things going on here when I feel happy about being able to provide Sunny this kind of intellectual stimulation, one altruistic and one selfish. On the noble side, I just hate that the little guy is cooped up in my room for 23 hours a day, because he's eager to get new experiences and he deserves to have them; but then less nobly but still true, a whole lot of times when we see problem cats on *My Cat From Hell*, they're suffering from under-stimulation, so I want to do everything I possibly can to stave off behavior problems like peeing on my things, keeping me awake all night, suddenly lashing out with his claws without notice, etc. It's been one delay after another with getting his fresh catgrass started, but I'm hoping after some potting soil arrives here from Amazon to finally begin that next week, and thus add yet another element to these ongoing efforts to keep Sunny stimulated throughout the day that he's here in this little room by himself.

It's Sunday, so time for another deep clean of the room! I finally got some hippie all-natural good-for-everyone all-purpose cleaning solution, so Sunny wouldn't have to be lounging around in fresh Lysol; but I didn't realize until after I bought it that cats hate the smell of citrus, so I don't know whether this lime-basil stuff will repel him or not. The all-natural clay cat litter continues to go well, and only gets loose from the box and out into the rest of my room absolutely no more than a tablespoon in an entire week; of course, I'm also freshly scooping it every 24 hours, right as Sunny's eating breakfast at 8:00 every morning and I'm about to go start my day in the kitchen, so that's keeping the mess (and the smell) down quite a lot. My friend

Carrie calls me a “Crazy Cat Gentleman” for things like this, or going to the trouble of giving him supervised trips around the third floor three times a day, etc.; but we wouldn’t think twice about doing things like that for a dog (in fact, it’s a law in Chicago that you have to pick up your dog’s poop), so I don’t see what the big deal is about making the same kind of commitment for a cat. Pet ownership is a two-way street; to get benefit out of it, you have to put in effort too.

August 25, 2025. Because of it being a busy Monday, I had to leave Sunny alone for the longest amount of time today since moving him to my room three weeks ago, about nine hours altogether without any daytime pop-ins. I'm a freelancer, so I work from the extra-large kitchen of our co-op between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., which is roughly analogous to spending the day working at a Starbucks or a co-working space, in that there are people coming and going all day long; but I typically stop by my room post-lunch on any day I'm not too busy, to supervise an afternoon prowl for Sunny in our third-floor hallway, followed by a prey-play session with my wand toy and then a couple of treats. Today I had to skip that, so I was relieved to get back around 5:30 p.m. and not find anything in my room either torn up or peed on, which I know from *My Cat From Hell* is a common behavior among cats who suffer from separation anxiety.

That said, he did do something when I got back that he doesn't do very often, which is "blepping," the cat community's cutesy slang for when a cat sticks its tongue out in pleasure. Being around him for almost a month now, I have a pretty good understanding of the hierarchy of behavior he displays whenever happy, excited, contented, etc., which in order of intensity is: 1) purrs; 2) closes his eyes; 3) flops on his back, his legs spread wide open; 4) drools; 5) kneads by gripping my finger in his curled paws; 6) gently bites on the tip of my finger like it's his mother's teat and he's a kitten again; 7) bleps. So it's a rare honor, one I cherish, whenever he feels so ecstatically blissful that he just sticks that tongue out with half-closed eyes and rides that wave of pleasure. *Ride that wave, Sunny.*

August 29, 2025. I've been taking a few days off from the journal, because there hasn't been anything new to report whatsoever; but after an endless amount of delays, my first order from Chewy.com has finally arrived! Wanted to get some initial thoughts down on the things I've so far tried.

First, just to make it official, the new spider lure was a huge dud; I got Sunny to halfheartedly take an interest in it for a few seconds yesterday before he quickly gave up, and now today he seems to actually be afraid of it. The newest mouse lures, though, have driven him as crazy as the older mice have, so I think we've got a pretty definitive answer at this point regarding what Sunny's particular personality is when it comes to the kind of prey he likes to chase.

The newest mice, by the way, are also filled with catnip, which was Sunny's first experience with the plant since I took over his guardianship (technically they're supposed to be standalone toys for a cat to bat around; I had to poke a hole in the nose myself to get it to attach to my wand), and he was clearly high by the time we were done playing. How do I know? Because suddenly he had an obsession with getting as vertically high up as he possibly could, first jumping up to the very top of my bookcases (which he typically doesn't like to do, because it involves first having to step on my radiator with all its rods and gaps everywhere); then if that wasn't enough, he then jumped on top of my icemaker for the very first time in his life, because he was suddenly obsessed with getting to the top of my closet for the very first time in his life, and somehow managed to miraculously balance himself on top of just one side of the hangars holding all my winter coats and almost make it all the way up. That's reckless behavior combined with lowered inhibitions, and in my book that adds up to one high kitty.

I also got to try one of his new treats yesterday for the first time, Elixir Kitchens Beef & Rosemary, with the gimmick here being that they're essentially pure meat that has been freeze-dried into little crunchy pellets. Frustratingly, the company advertises them as for both dogs and cats, but then the chunks ended up being too big for a cat's mouth, so I had to start by painstakingly chopping every single one in the bag in half with a paring knife before I could use them. Interestingly, Sunny went crazy for them yesterday, and I had been hopeful they might become his new Jackpot! treat that will make harness and carrier training go more smoothly; yet when I got them out today for another training session, he could barely even be bothered to acknowledge their existence, much less actually eat one, despite the fact that I was doing it at the same time as yesterday, essentially halfway between his breakfast and his dinner.

This tracks with other things I've noticed Sunny give an initial interest in (like that stuffed mouse toy that came with my litter box waste bags the other week, or a silvervine chew toy my housemate K. got him when she heard how much he took to the catnip), where he goes absolutely crazy for it the first day it's here, but even by day two he seems to have completely and utterly lost interest in it. (The silvervine made him *freaking nuts* last night when trying it for the first time, yet it's been sitting six inches away from him on the couch all afternoon today without him even bothering to look at it.) I don't have enough experience with cats to know if this is a general trait of the animals, this willingness to give up on a new stimulus quickly in order to be on the hunt for the next one, or if this is part of Sunny's particular unique personality; but in either case, he is for sure a cat who passionately loves things one day and then completely ignores them the next. Tonight I tried my second brand of treat, Hartz Delectables Squeeze Up Tuna & Salmon (the gimmick here being that it comes in a paste the cat licks up), and he went as crazy for it as he did the Elixir treats yesterday, so we'll see whether or not he's completely lost interest in it by tomorrow, like these other examples. (We'll also see whether it's simply that

Sunny needs some time between each type of treat to build up his excitement again; I'm going to deliberately withhold the Elixir freeze-dried stuff for a week, and see what happens when I try giving it to him again next Friday.)

And then finally, I got my PetSafe SSSCAT system working, which is basically an aerosol can that has nothing in it but the actual aerosol (i.e. it only sends out a puff of air), connected to a motion detector, which I wanted to try putting in front of A.'s plants during our thrice-daily prowls around the third floor, because those are now the very first thing Sunny runs to at a full gallop whenever he leaves my room, for the express purpose of chomping on them as much as possible until I can finally catch up to him and shoo him away. Unfortunately, though, it works a little too well, and so thoroughly scared the crap out of Sunny that it's now 24 hours later and he still refuses to walk into the room at all. So, let's get him courageous enough to go back in, then we'll see if he starts approaching the plants again, and then I'll decide whether or not to get the spray out again. I can attest, though, that it works like a charm!

August 30, 2025. A pretty huge moment this morning; for the very first time since becoming his guardian, Sunny slept the entire night in bed with me, and was still there when I woke up this morning. I have to admit, I was profoundly emotionally moved by this, and did quite a bit of crying in bed this morning as Sunny and I laid around, slowly waking up. When the cat first moved to my room a month ago, and studiously avoided the bed like the plague, I assumed that this was just an individual quirk of this particular cat (maybe aided by the fact that I have a memory foam mattress that squishes down beneath him with every step, that he was perhaps finding off-putting); but in the last week or two, it's become clear that the cat actually wants to sleep in my bed with me but that something has been holding him back, either fear or a past trauma regarding a bed, etc. To see him peacefully and nonchalantly finally do so last night felt like a big validation that the work I've been doing has been a success, and that he's letting go of all his past fears and traumas and finally gaining the "total cat mojo" Galaxy is always talking about.

M. and I were joking at dinner last night about how many similarities there are between caregiving for a cat and caregiving for an elderly person with dementia, like I've been doing with my parents over the last decade, and this is a big one—you will never hear from either of these creatures a "thank you" come out of their mouth to know you're on the right track, so instead you have to become an expert at watching and understanding these creatures' behavior, so that you can see the telltale signs that they're feeling comfortable and at peace to know that your work is doing some good. The joy of caring for a cat doesn't come from that creature expressing their gratitude towards you, because cats simply don't do that—although they may snuggle up against you and purr, that's 100 percent motivated by them getting something out of that for themselves, not them trying to say "I love you"—so you have to find the joy yourself by understanding what a noble thing you're doing, and getting pleasure out of knowing that you're causing that cat to feel safe, secure, confident, and stress-free. Ironically, it's that deep connection with our own humanity that makes caring for an animal so rewarding, the understanding that we're tapping into traits like compassion, empathy, and tolerance that we consider the best traits humans have. We erroneously attribute that to the cats themselves, and say things like, "This cat really loves me;" but what we're really getting pleasure from is us loving ourselves, and knowing that in those moments, we're being the best human beings that humans can possibly be.

Broke open the last of the new treat experiments tonight, Tiki Cat Duets Chicken (the gimmick here being that they're crunchy on the outside, creamy on the inside), and we might have finally found our first Jackpot! treat. The smell was so enticing to Sunny that he could sense it all the way through the sealed pouch it was shipped in, and was already pawing at it and biting on the bag even when I got it out; then when I actually opened it, he literally began jumping up and down, and after the three treats he got today, spent another fifteen minutes going back to those three spots to see if any leftover crumbs got forgotten. *Jackpot!*

August 31, 2025. A fascinating and alarming start to my morning today. After responding really vigorously at first last week to his new catnip-filled mouse lure during prey-play (which I do twice a day without fail, and often a third time when I have the spare time), I noticed that Sunny had been getting less and less enthused about it over the last two days, and that it was taking more and more to get him motivated to go chasing it when I spun it around the room. Simultaneously, I noticed that Sunny has started exhibiting paranoid behavior over the last couple of days, especially in the evening, where he will overreact to a simple noise like my rolling desk chair, or invent phantom enemies that don't actually exist. Whenever he gets riled up by these things, he will first get a case of the "zoomies" (which is when he'll run at a mad dash back and forth across the length of my room several times), then stuff himself into this tiny little crawlspace behind the slanted back of my couch (which he only does in emergencies, because it's difficult for him to squeeze himself into there), even to the extent of once taking a few extremely aggressive swipes at me, claws fully out, when I had done nothing else but peek in to see how he was doing.

That all culminated this morning, when I did my usual HCKEGS session but he wouldn't even touch his food afterwards; that's when I knew something was seriously wrong, because it's been the one and only time since I adopted him that I've seen the cat actively turn down food. The only thing that's changed in his life is the catnip, so on a hunch I looked up the subject, and it turns out that cats can absolutely overdose on catnip, and the list of behavior of an ODing cat turned out to be an exact list of everything I've been witnessing in Sunny the last couple of days. Apparently this usually isn't an issue, because cats desensitize to catnip quickly, so they tend to self-regulate their exposure to it (don't forget that this catnip-stuffed mouse is actually supposed to be a standalone toy, so the idea is that the cat will play with it for maybe ten minutes and get high, then ignore it for the next couple of days until they're in the mood to get high again); but by adding catnip to the lure he chases for twenty minutes apiece, three times a day, a behavior that's ingrained in him and that he can't stop doing even if he tried, he's been getting way too much catnip into his system whether or not he wanted it.

I'm not exactly feeling guilty about this, because I did specifically research the subject beforehand and saw all these assurances that your cat will not suffer any bad effects from catnip (turns out that instead of asking, "Can a cat get addicted to catnip," to which the Google AI bot said, "Not at all!", I should have asked, "Can a cat overdose on catnip," to which the Google AI bot replied, "Oh, yeah, a cat can *definitely* overdose on catnip!"); but nonetheless, it's extremely concrete proof that the catnip mice have to be saved for special occasions, and that I likely need to do the same with the silvertine chew toy K. got him, which he responds even more intensely to. (If catnip affects Sunny like cannabis would a human, then silvertine absolutely affects him like cocaine.)

September 1, 2025. Another stressful morning where Sunny first threw up (the second time in 24 hours, although this time it was nothing but saliva), then had no appetite for his breakfast until a full half-hour after I set it out. For now I'm interpreting this as him still trying to get that catnip out of his system, but I will be officially worried if tomorrow rolls around and he's still puking and having no appetite. We've been taking a break from the prey-play for the last 24 hours, because I figured that rest and recuperation is more important for a sick creature, although we've still been going out in the hallway for the usual prowling three times a day. Unfortunately, having a distressed cat is making me distressed as well, and I find myself this morning with this vague feeling of impatience and unhappiness for both myself and the rest of the world. It makes me wonder how I would've handled having a child, if I had ended up doing that while the window had still been open (I'm 56 this year, so I strongly doubt that kids are a part of my future), where the stakes and therefore the stress is so much higher.

Going out this particular day got me thinking about how I haven't written down the pattern these prowl-patrol sessions have ended up taking, which is a kind of fascinating rhythm that has only slowly revealed itself over the last month. The first time I open my door, Sunny takes off at a dead run, because his body's been working up the energy to go hunting for at least a half-hour at that point. He shoots down to A.'s room first, because she has plants he obsessively loves to chew on (I always shoo him away, which bums him out); then he'll go into H.'s room next door if it's open, then to N.'s room right next to it, then slowly make his way back to my room. But once there, instead of going back inside, he typically stops at the western bathroom next door to my room, snoops around in there for a while, then actually turns around for a second patrol of the territory the same as the first, only this time spending a little more time exploring in each room, and also crossing over to the desolate east wing of the hallway (which ends with a stairwell that's closed off to the cat, making that side of the hallway a dead end for him, which like all cats he doesn't care for).

He then goes back into my room, at which point I stand out in the hallway and call out, "Sunny? Sunny? Do you want to do another patrol?" At that point he'll typically saunter outside and do a third trip down the long hallway and back, stopping by all the open rooms and having one last good, long, exploratory sniff around everywhere. Then it's back to my room, where I close the door and we do prey-play with the mouse-lure wand toy for fifteen or twenty minutes. As soon as that's done, he usually begs to go out again, which I do, and he makes a fourth and final patrol up and down his territory, now more of a short victory lap than active exploration.

Then it's back to my room for the ritual opening of the 5.5-ounce can of wet food, which is roughly the same amount of food as three mice, which he eats in exactly that way (that is, he eats one third of the food immediately, then another third about a half hour later, then the last third about a half hour after that); then a half hour of grooming on his bed; then he's conked out for the rest of the evening. It took a few weeks to get that routine down, but that now seems to be what Sunny likes to do every single time we go out in the evening, and I'm all about building the repeating rituals the cat can eventually learn to enjoy and anticipate. (The sunrise session is similar, but not as long or expansive, since most people are still asleep and have their doors closed.)

How do I know I've taken another big step down the road to Crazy Cat Gentleman territory? Because, although I haven't completely drunk the Kool-Aid and decided to feed him an all raw food diet, I did tonight look up an easy home recipe for a supplement you can sprinkle on top of commercial cat food (called a "topper") to make it both more nutritious and appealing to the cat, and realized it's something I could easily do on a Sunday when I'm prepping all my

human meals for the week too. Basically, you boil one unseasoned, boneless, skinless chicken breast for twelve minutes; bake half a pound of squash at 425 degrees for an hour; and add half a cup of chicken broth (or if you want to go the extra mile, bone broth made for animals, which you can buy at Amazon). Puree until the consistency of gravy, then spoon one to two tablespoons on top of the commercial wet cat food. It's easy enough that I'm at least going to try it once! Then we'll see what Sunny thinks, and also see if it produces the shinier coat and lack of behavioral problems the authors of this recipe claim it will.

September 2, 2025. Sunny unfortunately was still exhibiting traits this morning from his catnip overdose; although he had just as much interest as always in exploring the third floor beyond my room, I couldn't get him even remotely interested in prey-play afterwards, and he once again didn't even begin his breakfast until a half-hour after I put it out (although to his credit, he eventually finished it all and didn't throw up, so at least he still has his appetite). It feels premature at this point to run in a panic to the vet, given that he's still eating, sleeping, and pooping on a normal schedule; so for now I'm choosing to remain patient about his recovery, and let him continue to abstain from prey-play if he's not feeling up for it, although with me always challenging him at each feeding session to get out and interact a little more. (Galaxy claims that it still counts as "play" even if a cat does nothing but sit still while intensely watching the prey go back and forth, because this is at least mentally exercising the cat and getting his brain working on something.)

Finished my supply of Blue Buffalo at breakfast today, so for dinner I moved on to our next batch around here, Purina Friskies Pate Turkey and Giblets (75 cents per 5.5 oz can; \$1.50 per day). This is about as cheap as cat food gets while still being considered nominally healthy, the pertinent word here being "nominally." The big issue is that it has rice in it, and cats are theoretically not supposed to be getting any carbs at all. That said, the general consensus seems to be that rice is the least disruptive carb a cat can have, and in fact some vets specifically recommend it for a sick cat; compare this for example to the Costco Kirkland stuff a few weeks ago that was making Sunny vomit every day, which on top of rice has potato in it, peas, yeast, pumpkin, soybeans, and beets, all of them starchy carbs designed specifically to make the small amount of meat in the food stretch as far as possible.

You can also see a big difference in the texture; the Blue Buffalo stuff consists of irregularly sized chunks of meat, as if we were looking at an actual chewed-up mouse, while the Friskies stuff is a smooth paste that looks like it was extruded out of a hose into the can (which it probably was). That reflects the fact that the top two ingredients in Friskies aren't specific type of meats but rather "meat by-products" and "poultry by-products," which not only can include pretty much any part of any animal all ground up (including hoofs, feathers, feces-filled intestines, etc.), but in the US can also legally include a certain amount of diseased animals and roadkill, making it not a great choice if you can afford better. (Turkey and giblets, named very prominently on the label, are way down at #4 and 5 on the ingredient list; right after them at #6 is the generic "fish," which Galaxy says is essentially the same thing as saying "fish by-products.") So far he's eating it just fine, although without the enthusiasm that always came with the Blue Buffalo stuff.

September 3, 2025. Good news—although Sunny continued to eschew mouse hunting during this morning’s feeding ritual, I was able to go back up during lunchtime and get him to fully be into it, the first time he’s done a 100 percent commitment to prey-play since having his catnip overdose three days ago. It makes sense that he might still be reticent about chasing the mouse lure during the 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. feedings, since these are the ones he now so thoroughly associates with the “poisoned” mouse. I gave him some treats today at the end of today’s successful lunchtime play; as BF Skinner proved almost a century ago, the easiest way to get an animal to do something is to associate it with something they like, so I’m hoping I can slowly get him to unlearn his bad experience with the catnip mouse and go back to associating hunting with something good. (Oh, and speaking of unlearning things, Sunny’s bedtime transformation has been complete for several days now; he now sleeps the entire night with me in my bed, every single night, a nice ending to a subject that obviously filled him with stress when he first moved in.)

Not much else to report today, although we did have an adorable moment during tonight’s prowl. Poor Sunny’s been cursed the last few days with almost all the bedroom doors being closed at the exact time he’s been out, and you can visibly tell that it bums him out. When he turned the corner tonight, though, and saw that there was not one, not two, but three bedroom doors open (my housemate N. has been the latest person on the third floor to agree to let Sunny wander in and out of her room during his prowls), he literally pranced as he ran towards them, as if saying, “Yippee! Yippee!” Sunny is easily at his happiest whenever he’s exploring something new or that he doesn’t get much access to, which makes it a shame that he’s stuck here in my room 23 hours a day, and then has nothing else to explore but the third floor even when he’s out. I’m thinking more and more seriously about trying to start harness training immediately, and not wait until next spring and the resumption of warm weather.

September 4, 2025. Oh no! Sunny puked four different times in 24 hours! (It's also worth noting that both his breath and his poop have really started to stink while on the Friskies too.) Well, that's it for the cheap gross stuff; starting tomorrow, he temporarily goes on the expensive stuff at Whole Foods, while I order and then wait for another bulk order of the healthy stuff. Nothing else new to report at all today.

September 5, 2025. Made it over to Whole Foods today, to pick up a temporary supply of food to hold us over until the next bulk shipment arrives from Amazon. The store's in-house generic brand, Whole Paws Grain Free Turkey & Giblets Loaf, is actually quite a deal; only \$1.20 per 5.5 oz can (or \$2.40 per day), but with almost the exact same ingredient list as Sunny's beloved Blue Buffalo (by which I mean the top listed ingredients include actual turkey meat, actual chicken meat, chicken liver, chicken heart, and chicken broth). He ate it down with no hesitation, but of course that's never the problem around here; we'll see whether or not he actually keeps it down.

Sadly, Sunny still seems affected enough by his catnip overdose at the beginning of the week that he's still just not into chasing the mouse lure at all, although you can see he's trying; he at least likes to watch the mouse very intensely as I make it dart in and out of his reach, and every so often he'll reach out and give it a good paw, especially when I'm dangling it in the air in front of his face. Since nothing truly crucial is going wrong in his life right now—he's still eating normally every day, still sleeping normally every day, still pooping and peeing normally every day—I'm just going to stay patient with the mouse lure and assume that it's simply going to take Sunny some time to get fully back into the routine again, but that he'll eventually get there. Whether it's that he's still sick, or that he's now associating that mouse lure with the "poison" of the overdose, hopefully with time and repetition he'll eventually get over it, because I sure would hate seeing him permanently lose his enjoyment for hunting prey.

September 7, 2025. Well, hallelujah—Sunny has finally begun fully playing with the mouse lure again. I don't think it's any coincidence at all that this didn't happen until the day my brand-new mouse lures arrived from Amazon, fresh from the cat-lure factory and without any scents to remind him of the "poison" of last week. He was excited, too, when they finally arrived yesterday, and he played for an extra-long and extra-hard time, as if he had missed hunting as well. Now, to be sure, he's still not eating when I first put out his food, but rather is waiting about fifteen or twenty minutes, which I find unusual; but since he's eventually eating the entire can with no problems, I'm treating that as a minor issue only, one that hopefully time and more exercise will finally solve. It's also worth noting that over the last several days, Sunny has both wanted to go out into the hallway more than usual, and wants to stay out there for longer than usual, which may or may not be him making up for the lack of mouse-hunting this week. Again, we'll see how this shakes out once he starts getting back into the habit again.

September 8, 2025. Up and down news today. On the plus side, Sunny continues to be very passionately into prey-play again, and was highly motivated to hunt, catch, and kill as many times as I wanted to get the mouse lure out (which was a lot today, because I'm seeing if I can wear him out, so that he'll sleep a little more soundly and wait until 6 a.m. to wake me up, instead of his recent routine of 5 a.m.). An interesting thing about his post-catnip-overdose routine, in fact, is that he's now much more into the lure going up into the air and behaving like a bird, even though he still wants it to be a mouse lure, and will still only barely pay attention to lures with bird feathers. I'm relieved to see that, and to see it become part again of our morning and evening feedings. I looked it up here in the journal just now (thank *you*, journal!), and learned it was a week and a day ago now that I first noticed Sunny's symptoms of ODing on catnip, so I'm glad to see that it looks like we're starting to view that from the rearview mirror.

On the minus side, for the very first time in the month and a half I've had him, Sunny just flat-out refused his breakfast this morning, and it was still largely sitting there untouched by the time I emptied it out for this evening's dinner. At this point, I don't know if that's a reaction to the cheap but supposedly healthy Whole Foods in-house cat food brand, Whole Paws (Sunny's been only so-so about it), or if it's a reaction to the homemade "raw cat" topper I've been putting on it the last couple of meals; so for now I've stopped both and have switched to the newest bulk order from Amazon, which indeed arrived today, Tiki Cat After Dark Chicken & Quail Egg in Broth.

To remind you, Tiki Cat is the company that makes the treat Sunny has so far been the most insanely into, the kind he'll literally jump in the air about when he sees them coming out. This is far and away the most expensive brand I've bought yet—\$3.33 per 5.5-ounce can, or \$6.66 per day—but also one of the most healthy; it has no vegetables, rice, or other carbs at all, no meat by-products, no generic fish, no guar gum (a food thickener which technically your cat shouldn't be eating, but is present in 95 percent of all cat food brands), nothing but real quail eggs with real chicken meat, heart, gizzard, and liver. And I gotta add, in all honesty, it's the only cat food we've tried yet that comes out of the can looking like an actual plate of human food, nothing but shredded chicken and small-sized eggs in a gravy.

After days and days now of lackluster eating, Sunny really dug into the Tiki Cat tonight, and has been coming back to the plate over and over as I've sat here writing this, eating about half a mouse at a time and rapidly getting close to finishing the plate. So, you know, maybe it's time for me to adjust my budget expectations a bit beyond the \$5 per day I've had as my maximum since first bringing on the cat, as long as I've found something that sounds so good, looks so good, and Sunny reacts to so passionately. Of the six brands I've now tried, the only other one besides Tiki Cat I plan on putting into the regular rotation is Blue Buffalo, which is much less expensive (only \$1.75 per 5.5-ounce can, or \$3.50 a day), so that should keep the overall cost of food per month down to a more reasonable level. After having such a hard time finding brands that don't get him sick, much less that he likes, I'm loath to give this one up, even at the significantly higher price.

September 10, 2025. My neighbors here on the third floor of my co-op are getting less and less tolerant of Sunny's sojourns out into the hallway (I've agreed not to take him out on his morning prowls at all anymore, and to forgo his lunchtime prowls on the weekends), so I've decided to push my plans forward to try to get him harness and leash trained, which I had originally planned to wait until next spring to start. I bought it using a gift card I got from Chewy.com for being a new customer (it may be my very last Chewy order, because they royally screwed up my first-ever order—plus, pretty much everything I would ever buy there, I can also buy at Amazon for the exact same price), and it arrived yesterday, so I officially began the training today.

According to the numerous YouTube videos I watched on the subject, the two keys to successful harness training is to tie it heavily to treats, and to keep your goals low and slow. So to begin with, I'm leaving it out in his main hangout space all the time, because I want him to get used to it just being a normal part of his daily life, and not trigger an "uh-oh, something special's happening" response when I get it out, like I see from him for example when I first put on my shoes in the morning in preparation for leaving for the day. Then starting today, during his normal treat time (which I usually give him after a successful lunchtime prowls and prey-play session), I fed him three or four treats as we both sat on the couch and I very loosely draped the harness over his back unfastened, simply so he can start getting used to it while associating it with something good. According to the videos I watched, this should be the one and only goal for the next week, and that I shouldn't even think about starting to actually fasten the Velcro straps until I get to day 8 of the training.

I honestly had no idea how the first day of training was going to go—I could easily picture Sunny being one of those cats who absolutely detests having anything on him—so I was relieved to discover that to him, it was like he didn't have a harness on at all, and that he was singularly focused on the treats and didn't even try to buck off or otherwise rid himself of it. I'm taking that as a positive sign for now, and evidence that I might not actually have too many problems with then fully fastening the harness (week 2), leading him around the third floor on a leash (week 3), then finally trying the stairs for the first time (week 4). We could really use a win around here these days (Sunny unfortunately continues to feel only so-so about eating his food, and has been throwing up once every few days no matter what brand we're trying), so I'm hoping that by the end of October, he and I will be doing daily visits to the back yard out in the great outdoors, where he'll finally get to do that "wild cat" exploration that he's clearly yearning for.

And finally, a legitimately huge surprise to end the day. It's getting cool enough here in Chicago that I didn't need my air conditioner today; and since I have a floor type of AC with a big hose leading out the window, I decided to just take the hose out and open the window this afternoon instead, at which point Sunny immediately ran over to the window and stayed there riveted the entire rest of the afternoon. The funny thing is, he didn't even do much besides just stare at things while sniffing so hard, I could see his little nose pulsating back and forth; but let's not forget that cats have twenty times the scent receptors as we do, so opening the window for the first time since he moved in a month and a half ago must have been like suddenly getting a surprise trip to Disneyland in terms of exciting new smells. So, lesson learned—keep the window open for as much of the year as possible, because Sunny obviously gets a deeply enriching experience out of it.

September 11, 2025. Not much to report today—it was one of my days where I was responsible for cooking a meal for twenty people here at the co-op, so I was largely out of my room altogether. I did, however, want to jot down one big development, which is that while doing our harness training with treats today, I went ahead and upped the schedule and tried actually fastening the harness to Sunny's body, instead of just letting it loosely drape over his back like the training videos say to do it at this early stage (today was only day #2 of the training), simply to see what would happen. I'm happy to report that, once again, in Sunny's eyes it was like he wasn't wearing anything at all; no complaints, no trying to tear it off, no reaction whatsoever. Emboldened by this, I'm going to try actually doing his daytime hallway prowl tomorrow with the harness and leash fully on, just to see how he reacts. Here's hoping it goes well! (**Update, September 12:** Although Sunny wore his harness out in the hallway just fine, he didn't care for having a leash attached to it, and after just a couple of steps then refused to move at all until it was taken off. So, we'll spend next week just getting him used to walking around the third floor in the harness; after a week of that, then I'll try attaching the leash again.)

September 14, 2025. As I mentioned before, my floormates have asked that I no longer take Sunny out for his lunchtime prowl on the weekends, which combined with the elimination of morning prowls altogether means he's now only getting to leave the room a tiny amount of time on Saturdays and Sundays. Sure enough, the exact thing happened that I worried would happen, which is that Sunny decided to make up for the lost exercise at 1:00 in the morning last night, spending 90 straight minutes knocking off every single item I own that's on a shelf (he's obsessed with getting to the top of my doorless closet, even though there's nothing up there he'd be into; he knows he'll get in trouble if I catch him, which is why he does it in the middle of the night when I'm asleep), then jumping onto my bed at a full gallop and pawing at my asleep face so I would get up and play too. So, lesson learned—from now on I need to put in an extra amount of prey-play in my room on the weekends, if I expect Sunny to continue sleeping through the night.

Unfortunately, this clashes with my original plans to dial back my own activities at the same time I was dialing back Sunny's; the simple fact is that for the last month, I've been getting one hour less sleep per night than the minimum I need to feel rested (about five hours a night instead of six), combined with getting almost twice the amount of daily steps in as I usually do, which I didn't notice for weeks but is now finally starting to all catch up with me, so that I'm feeling exhausted pretty much 24/7 these days. I had been hoping that, as long as I was being forced to dial back the amount of exercise Sunny's getting, that would dial back the amount I get too; but I can see now that I'm going to actually expend even more energy than before, trying to convince Sunny to get in the same amount of exercise in my 150-square-foot room on the weekends as he usually gets by prowling the entire length and width of our full building. The challenges of a cat guardian never end!

I did want to also note that yesterday Sunny refused to eat his morning edition of the Tiki Cat chicken and quail egg food, after a past couple of days of only getting through it more and more slowly, despite beginning the run absolutely thrilled with it. This is an ongoing problem I've noticed with Sunny, that no matter how excited he is about a new type of food or treat the first couple of days he tries it, he eventually reaches a point where he first feels lackluster about it, then completely loses his interest in it altogether. So maybe this is less about the taste or digestive qualities, and more an individual personality quirk, that Sunny simply gets tired of things quickly? I still have four cans of Tiki Cat left, and it's way too expensive to just throw away; so for now I've switched to his next brand, Sheba Perfect Portions with Sustainable Tuna, which as usual he has responded to very passionately here in the first 24 hours. (He liked it so much yesterday—and I suspect was so hungry from not eating any of his morning meal—he wouldn't even let me take the dish down to the floor, but instead insisted on jumping up on my table and immediately eating it there.) I'm going to try this for three or four days, then switch back to the rest of the Tiki Cat, just to see whether my current working theory is true, that it's not that he actively dislikes these brands but that he gets sick of *all* brands of food when eating them too many days in a row.

At least one new thing is going right around here these days, which is that Sunny continues to be as fascinated by all the outdoor smells as he was when I first opened my bedroom window a few days ago. Next week the plan is to see if I can get him wandering around the third floor with no hesitation while wearing his harness without a leash; if that goes well, hopefully it'll be just another week or two before he's finally getting to go to the back yard, where his immersion into the full senses of the outdoors will finally be complete.

With the help of M., I finally trimmed Sunny's claws for the first time today. I did it essentially the same exact way I watched the vet nurses do it a month ago down at the animal hospital; M. loosely held him in a bath towel, I took out one paw at a time, I pressed down on each toe to make the claw pop out, then I clipped off the very last bit of tip, just the part causing the claw to be sharp. (Unlike human fingernails, claws are an extension of a cat's body, full of blood vessels and nerve endings, so it's crucial that you don't cut too far down.) Thankfully, it went exactly like it did at the animal hospital, by which I mean Sunny didn't put up a fuss at all, other than to occasionally jerk his paw out of my hand when my fumbling beginner moves were a little too alarming for him. The nurses had mentioned that Sunny is unusually calm about things like getting examined and having his claws trimmed, and M. confirmed this today; she grew up with a cat herself, and she told me that when they would trim his claws back when she was a child, the cat would constantly yowl and squirm. Score one for Sunny, I suppose, to help put him back at zero after his demerit for puking up half the food he ever tries eating.

September 17, 2025. Nothing new to report around here, other than to confirm that when I had a day like yesterday where I once again didn't get to help Sunny get his usual amount of exercise (in this case because it was time once again for me to cook dinner for twenty people here at the co-op and then singlehandedly clean the kitchen afterwards, a process that when combined with my day job keeps me busy without a break literally from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.), the cat instead gets his exercise in the middle of the night while I'm sleeping. In this case, he finally made it to the top of my closet, where he proceeded to knock off all the two-foot-long plastic bins I'm keeping my stuff in at the moment (until I finally finish my room remodeling and get all my new furniture installed), six feet down and dropping straight onto my sleeping legs at two in the morning. I was already running on fumes, from the constant sleep deprivation and over-exercise of the last month and a half, so getting jolted awake in the middle of the night, and not getting back to sleep for another hour, does not help the situation whatsoever.

My friend L. is now the only person besides myself to have read this currently private journal, and she recommended a book very similar to it, Caleb Carr's *My Beloved Monster*. She's right, I did find it interesting; it essentially conveys the same factual information as Galaxy's *Total Cat Mojo* (through the story of the very last of a long series of cats Carr owned before his own death in 2024), but since Carr was a famous academic writer, it's all written more...you know, MFA-ey. That said, there's something he does here in this book that I not only *don't* do in my own life, but that I find *important* to not do and that I go out of my way to not do; namely, although he's obviously exaggerating much of the time for literary effect, it's clear that Carr (who had a somewhat bizarrely intense relationship with cats, including the belief that he was a cat himself in a past life) really did believe that his cat thought and reasoned like a human, and he goes to great lengths in the book to showcase the conversations he was always having with it, which he really did believe the cat could understand and respond to in a fellow human way.

This is related to something else that happens around here on a semi-regular basis, which is that my housemate N. has a habit of referring to me as Sunny's parent, such as the time she tried to call the cat over in the hallway to no avail, but he sauntered on over once I called for him, to which she replied, "Aww, he'll only listen to his dad!" That always makes me smile, but it also always kind of bothers me a little, for the same reason that I'm bothered by the idea of ascribing human traits and rationalizations to Sunny's behavior. It's really important to me that Sunny be given the dignity to be treated exactly like the creature he is, a cat, and to have his behavior thought of exactly like the cat behavior it is, so that no one is reacting to him and punishing him based on thoughts like, "He knocks things over in the middle of the night because he's trying to get back at me for being on the computer for too long earlier," etc. That's not only how cats end up suffering for things they can't help doing, but it also prevents the owner from knowing how to do the things that will stop the behavior, a negative for both the creatures in that situation.

And similarly, I've talked about this in the journal before, but it's important to me that my relationship with Sunny not be based on something too sentimental, like the idea of me being his "daddy" and catering to his every whim. There's a whole host of potential problems that comes with a relationship like that, everything from discipline issues to cat obesity, the human becoming intolerable to other humans, the risk of falling fully into "Crazy Cat Gentleman" territory like my friend Carrie is always good-naturedly accusing me of being, and a lot more. As I've said in the past, I prefer to think of Sunny as my roommate, albeit one I have to feed and let out myself; but other than his lack of thumbs, he has his life and I have mine, and while I try to make those come together as much as I can, I don't worry too much about the times I can't.

There are times when he doesn't even want to be looked at by me, and I respect and honor that; and in return, there are times when he's all cozily snuggled up against me but I have something to do, and I don't have any problem with pivoting him 90 degrees and then unceremoniously getting up and leaving. I want my relationship with Sunny to be realistic, not treacly; and I want him to get the care he deserves, not the kind I'm only guessing at after assuming he's reacting to situations the same way I would.

September 18, 2025. More proof last night of the direct relationship between amount of exercise and quality of sleep; when I did hallway prowls followed by prey-play at 5 p.m. (short, only about ten minutes), 7:30 p.m. (long, thirty minutes), and 10 p.m. right before bed (ten minutes again), Sunny slept peacefully and soundly throughout the night (or at least I slept peacefully and soundly throughout the night, and Sunny stayed quiet enough to let me). There's a pretty simple and direct cause and effect going on here, which is that if I want to be able to sleep peacefully through the night without interruption, I need to do multiple rounds of third-floor prowling combined with mouse-lure prey-play; and if it's a day where I don't have time to space those multiple rounds out evenly throughout the day and evening, then it has to be crammed in every couple of hours over a protracted period right before bed. The cat is certainly up for it; in fact, sometimes it feels like the cat would infinitely play and prowl the entire time he's awake, if I simply provided him the opportunity to.

It has me thinking about one of the many elements I enjoyed in Caleb Carr's *My Beloved Monster*, the idea that for those small but growing amount of people who understand what unique things come with owning a cat versus owning a dog, there's a special and really powerful kind of bonding available that equals and sometimes eclipses the intimacy that develops between a human and their dog. (To remind you, I grew up with big dogs [boxers], so I'm not anti-dog at all, and would've undoubtedly gotten a dog if I had decided to adopt at 26 instead of 56.) Whenever we go prowling the third floor of my co-op, for example, Sunny will not proceed too far forward unless he knows I'm closely behind and following him; in fact, if I get too far behind, he'll stop, look behind him, and meow incessantly until I catch up.

That would be cute and sentimental even if you knew nothing about cats; but for me now, learning this through the writings of people like Carr and Galaxy, I understand that cats have only been indoor domesticated pets for 150 years now, and that we haven't done nearly the kind of breeding with them that we've done with dogs over the last 5,000 years, as far as getting each new generation a bit more and more friendly, a bit more and more loyal, a bit more and more expressive with human facial gestures as a way of bonding with humans, etc. Sunny still shares 96 percent of the DNA of the ancestral cat his bloodline comes from (namely, the African Wildcat, still a thriving species that can be found in the millions throughout most of Africa, most of the Middle East, and reaching into China), so he hasn't been bred to care about what humans think of him, or with a compulsion to want to please us.

So when Sunny acts friendly towards me, that's no little thing; for a cat, that means he's accepted you into his colony (which I prefer to call "tribe," because that's so much more a romantic term, don't @ me), which is when a group of feral cats join together in order to keep each other safe. This is not a random thing, but comes from repeated contact and friendly relations; and once a creature is accepted into a tribe, it's essentially like being in a gang, where all the members have each other's backs and all of you as a group help mark and maintain the territory your tribe owns. So when I watch Sunny call for me to hurry up and join him, I understand that as the powerful thing it is; that's essentially the cat declaring that he's putting the safety of his life into my hands, and that I can expect him to defend my safety to that kind of intense extent too. When we prowl together for mice in the hallway at sunset, stalking around the unlit dark hallways, I understand what a powerful act of vulnerability Sunny is displaying, and I've come to really appreciate (indeed, honor with humility) how much more powerful this earned respect is than the undeniably fun but nonetheless inbred loyalty and excitement modern dogs display towards their owners, after 5,000 years of selective breeding specifically to make those goofily loyal slobbering idiots the dominant type of pet now. (To really vibrantly

understand what I'm getting at, imagine going out to the snowy forests of northern Russia, drugging a wild wolf, then letting him wake up the next morning in your three-bedroom suburban ranch house in Ohio with your spouse and two kids, with no warning and no training at all. That's essentially what we do every time we adopt a housecat.)

September 19, 2025. A pretty huge day today; for the very first time, Sunny did a calm and happy walk around the third floor wearing both his harness and his leash. Thankfully, getting him to wear the harness hasn't been difficult at all, and he takes to it very naturally; but once it's on, he's been having a hard time getting used to walking around in it, and his movements eventually come to a complete standstill the first time the leash accidentally hits his head or gets tangled around his legs. The secret, it turns out, is to hold the leash straight up in the air the whole time, so that he doesn't even realize it's attached to the harness. I left both stairwell doors open this time, in the hopes that he would be curious and venture into them; but he was actually pretty spooked by the suddenly open doorways, and stayed far clear of them. After just one patrol down the hallway and back to my room without incident, I decided not to push my luck, so took the harness off at that point, gave him some treats to reinforce the behavior, then let him do the rest of his lunchtime patrol bareback. Given that I originally wasn't even going to try this until next year, that most of the YouTube guides on the subject said it would then take at least an entire month of daily training to get to this point, and that it's only been nine days since he was introduced to the harness at all for the first time, I'm feeling lucky and enthusiastic merely about getting him to do any walking around at all in it today.

As long as I'm doing catch-up today, here on a Friday afternoon when I've gotten my day job finished early, let me mention that Sunny is now fully back into the prey-play with the mouse lure again, three weeks after his initial catnip overdose. As always, he continues to be such a ferocious hunter that I have to change out the lure once every couple of weeks, because he literally mauls them until they're sad one-eyed misshapen lumps of fur; interestingly, the last time I ordered some, I bought some fancy ones that are made out of real deer hair and look amazingly like real mice, but Sunny has only been half-heartedly into those, and vastly prefers his cheapo little five-dollar polyester lures I get from Amazon. I'll take my breaks where I can get them!

September 20, 2025. As usual whenever Sunny finally broaches something new and scary, the cat is breaking new ground every day right now with the harness and leash, this time not only walking around just fine with them on, but actually going out into the west stairwell and exploring, now that he's had a day (yesterday) when the door was at least open and he could scope out the Big Scary Unknown for a bit. In fact, I'm pretty sure he would've gone all the way down to the first floor today, except that I hadn't expected him to actually go down an entire flight and so I hadn't shut the fire door to the second floor; there's another cat that has already lived on that floor for a long time, and I don't want the territory encroaching to set off some kind of big fight. So I stopped him at the doorway by holding the leash tight, which he did not like whatsoever, and I had to pretty much carry him back to my room. Still, this was a pretty big day, so I'm counting this as a victory. If history is any indication, come Monday when we try a stairwell prowl again, he should be now nice and ready to go dashing down the space, since it typically only takes Sunny one good experience to get quite comfortable with any new situation.

September 21, 2025. I should get a food update posted here while I have the chance, which is that we basically continue to have a lot of problems with food. The issue is that, no matter how much Sunny seemingly likes a particular brand or type of food when we first start on it, he seems to always get sick of it even by halfway through, and for the second half of that order will respond only half-heartedly to eating, or sometimes refuse to eat at all. In fact, of the seven types of wet food we've now tried, the one and only brand he continues to go crazy for even a full eight days after starting is the current Sheba stuff, which unfortunately is problematic; not only does it come in the most inconvenient container of them all (instead of a simple metal can, each serving consists of two tiny plastic containers perforated together, with a foil top that's almost impossible to get off without getting cat food all over your fingers), but the supposed 5.2 ounces of food in each double container is actually way less food than you find in an average 5.5 ounce metal can, and consists much more of liquid than the others. (I scoop Sunny's litter literally every 24 hours, so I can state with some authority at this point that on his normal days, he typically poops exactly three times and pees exactly three times; but whenever he eats Sheba and nothing else, the only solid waste that comes out of him in a 24-hour period is one teeny tiny little turd.)

Thankfully, though, the double-chambered nature of the Sheba containers can work to my advantage here as well, and for the last several days I've been finishing up my supply of Tiki Cat by basically mixing half a 5.5-ounce can each meal with one half of the Sheba container (for a total of 5.3 ounces of food). That's been working like gangbusters—even with them mixed, Sunny loves that Sheba stuff so much that he won't even wait for me to finish preparing the meal, but will jump up on my table and immediately start gobbling it even while I'm pouring it out of the container, and because of this he's now back to a good solid three bowel movements each day. So for the time being, that's going to be my plan moving forward, to just always mix his main food on any given day with half a container of Sheba, even though this now brings his daily food expense up even more (from \$3.50-6.50 a day to now \$4-7).

Yesterday I started a brand-new shipment, Purina ONE High Protein Chicken in Gravy (\$1.25 per three-ounce can, or \$3.50 a day when you add in the Sheba). It's actually impressive for being a Purina line, a company that is otherwise the Walmart of the cat food world (i.e. with most of their lines, like Friskies and Fancy Feast, their MO is to pump out unhealthy crap as cheaply as possible and then spend billions in advertising to convince cat owners to buy it); the ONE line features no carbs or grains whatsoever, and has real animal parts like chicken, chicken liver, salmon, and pork lungs listed in the ingredients, instead of dodgy generic ingredients like "fish" and "poultry by-products." It also looks and feels like real chunks of meat, just like Blue Buffalo, versus the cheaper brands that essentially look like meat toothpaste squirted out of a tube. I'm doing the same thing here as with the Tiki Cat, mixing one three-ounce can each meal with half a Sheba container (or another 2.6 oz, for a total of 5.6 oz of food); and the cat so far is gobbling it down with no problems, so we'll see if that continues.

September 25, 2025. Not much to report around here over the last several days, other than to mention that Sunny's harness training continues improving by regular leaps and bounds. Today, in fact, we made it all the way to the basement from the third floor, all through Sunny's initiative (I've discovered there's no point in just trying to carry the cat to a new place, because he'll simply freak out and immediately want to go back to my room), ending just steps away from our building's back door; so I'm starting to suspect that within the next week, we might just be going outdoors into the back yard for the first time (aided by a new name tag to put on the harness, and a new Tile Bluetooth tracker as well, both of which are currently on their way from Amazon). I've been grateful to see that Sunny is finally starting to associate the harness with open exploration, and is actually starting to get a bit visibly excited whenever I get it out now. As soon as it's fastened, he's already at a fast trot towards my door, eager to go out.

I suppose the biggest news, though, is that one of my housemates has also ended up rescuing an abandoned cat! AND IT'S A KITTEN!!!!!! They found her right on our co-op's front porch last week, in fact, and took her down to Partners Animal Hospital (Sunny's regular vet as well), where they found that she has no microchip and was also suffering from some basic medical problems, the kinds that indicate she's been out on her own for a while now. It's been extremely gratifying to be able to take the advice I've gotten from Jackson Galaxy and be able to apply it directly to the newly christened Mishi; for example, her guardian has been complaining about the cat getting the zoomies across her face at two o'clock every morning, so all of us together have begun doing extremely vigorous prey-play with a wand toy for at least a cumulative hour each day (unlike Sunny, the kitten will attack any kind of lure that's attached to the wand, and jumps dozens of times per session straight up a foot into the air), followed immediately with the feeding of two or three treats, then lots of petting afterwards, which has been getting the cat to finally start sleeping deeply through the night, just like how it worked on Sunny too. It's been really enjoyable to be around that kind of kitten energy for a regular amount of time every day this week, much more chaotic and intense than even the three-year-old Sunny.

The other interesting thing about it all is that it's humbly reminded me of just how much work I've put into making Sunny's life a happy and stable one, and how I have the relative privilege to do that at this particular point in my life, a luxury others don't. Mishi's guardian is out of the house a lot more than me, makes a lot less money than me, and is dealing with some chronic medical issues in her own life, so she simply hasn't had the time, money, or energy to make sure the cat is getting everything she needs, which sadly is already making her think about taking the kitten to a shelter in the hopes of getting him adopted by a full family with a full house to explore. I, on the other hand, am making enough money these days that I can make a substantial investment in the cat; I work from home as a freelancer, so I have the opportunity to check in with him multiple times a day, and to take him out for a full exercise session at lunch; I've educated myself on cats over the last two months to a ridiculous extent, so that I know with authority how to react to every new situation; and I've adopted a deeply empathetic, deeply compassionate attitude towards the cat, and am really dedicated to putting in whatever kind of time and effort is needed for these things like harness-training him, taking him out multiple times a day, giving him his "no human zone" at the end of the couch, and more.

For the last two months I've just been kind of barreling through these things, thinking that they're simply the kind of stuff every cat owner does, because that's what you have to do when you're a cat owner; but this experience with my housemate has reminded me that there are a lot of cat owners who actually don't do any of these things, sometimes by necessity and sometimes by choice, and that I should be proud of myself for putting aside the time, money, and

energy to do so for Sunny. It makes him a happy cat, and it makes me a happy human; and really, isn't that what we should all be striving toward?

September 27, 2025. I've noticed that Sunny has sneezed multiple times over the last 24 hours, which has coincided with an almost complete lack of interest in chasing his mouse lure for the last 48 hours, so I'm starting to suspect he's a bit sick, especially since we had our first unexpectedly cold night of the year a few days ago (and I keep my window open all night, to encourage Sunny to go sniff things at two in the morning instead of running all over my face). I did some research online, and he doesn't have the symptoms of being seriously sick—his nose isn't wet, he isn't coughing, he doesn't have any discharge coming from his eyes or nose—so even if he is sick, which I'm not 100 percent convinced of to begin with, I suspect he only has a mild "cold*." There's not much to be done, unfortunately, except to keep the room warm and moist (WebMD literally encourages you to take the cat in the bathroom with you when you take a hot bath or shower), and deliberately keep the cat's activities to a minimum.

*Cats technically get a different virus when sick than the one that causes a human cold; we only call it this for convenience's sake.

September 28, 2025. A full 24 hours of a warm, moist room and relaxed exercise seemed to do the trick for Sunny; he hasn't sneezed a single time today, and he was back to very vigorously chasing the mouse lure again (sometimes to the extent of jumping straight up into the air like a kitten, which tends to happen his first time back after taking some time off from being interested in prey-play). Maybe he's better; maybe I overread it altogether; who knows.

I'm really glad to have Sunny be a friendly, inquisitive fellow, one who is okay on his own (by which I mean down on the opposite side of the room on his bed) for only a limited amount of time, before he's up again and in need of some serious pets and cuddles, very happily going to the trouble of plopping down in a prone position all the way across the length of your keyboard, if that helps *disrupt you enough from your precious internet* to give him the pets and cuddles he deserves. After all, we're talking about Crown Prince Sunny of the Kingdom of Infinite Love, whose family rules over a peaceful, idyllic cat society where human slaves provide infinite pets and cuddles to all subjects 24 hours a day. He's "out among the common people" these days, his kingdom's version of the Amish rumspringa, where he gets to know the hoi polloi until it's time again for him to return to the royal palace and rule over the people he's now gotten to deeply understand.

Once he gets to know you, Sunny is friendly like a dog is friendly; and I grew up with dogs, so I vastly prefer having a cat like this than one who shirks and hides all the time (or, you know, is lazy and arrogant). So, while it would be easy to lose your patience with the cat when he walks all over your keyboard on the hunt for attention, I try instead to remember what a wonderful thing it is to have a delicate, smart, funny creature like this want your attention and intimacy in the first place; so I instead simply hit Control-L when I see him coming, so to enact a freeware app I installed the other week called Cat Lock (which utterly freezes your keyboard until you click your mouse button again), and stop whatever I had been doing to instead give Sunny lots of pets and cuddles, while he plops right down on my laptop and ensures that I wouldn't be able to do anything else anyway. After living alone for thirty years, it's a privilege to have a creature around who wants your attention that much, so I'm inclined to give it to him whenever he wants, and help Sunny get even closer to the state Galaxy calls "total cat mojo."

September 30, 2025. I haven't updated in a while because we're in a bit of a holding pattern around here until hopefully the end of today, when Sunny's new name tag arrives and I can finally try taking him outside for the first time. Meanwhile, though, I wanted to mention that my housemate's rescue kitten Mishi also received a harness and leash this week, and she took almost immediately not only to wearing it but happily going outside with it on, pretty definitive proof that she's been living an outdoor feral lifestyle for a certain amount of time now. I let her wander around our yard for about a half hour yesterday, and was pleased to see that she wanted exclusively to tromp around in the thickest part of our weeds and overgrown summer produce, essentially being the wildest wild cat she can get away with while still being on a leash within an urban yard. That's fun and exciting to watch, and gives me hope that Sunny will respond to the yard just as passionately.

October 1, 2025. A big day around here! To begin with, Sunny went outside into our yard for the very first time today, way ahead of schedule from the literal next spring I had originally been on planning on waiting until, and also ahead of schedule from where the YouTube tutorials told me I'd likely be by now (I put the harness on him for the first time just about three weeks ago). Now, granted, he was a bit terrified; he couldn't get up the courage to walk up out of the concrete basement stairwell in the back of our building, although he was certainly craning his neck a lot and trying to get a sense of what was going on up there in the big wide world, and when I manually carried him up to our picnic tables in the back yard, he made a mad dash back to the basement door and had to go pretty much from there straight back up to my bedroom. But still, that was a pretty huge step forward on its own today, especially after three weeks; and like all things that seem scary to Sunny at first, now that he's broached the subject, I bet he'll get a lot more courageous very soon.

Then after that, I was back out again with the harness and leash, but this time for our house's other abandoned rescue, Mishi. I've been helping out with walking Mishi for a number of days now, but this was the very first time I did it with the baby currently living in our house out in the yard with us, a spritely and very emotional 22-month-old who has recently started speaking a few English words, interacting with a larger amount of the house besides just their parents, and being extremely curious about everything.

They've been fascinated but scared by Mishi in recent days, as the cat has gotten her harness and has been seen by the baby coming and going through the kitchen to the back yard on a regular basis. So today, as the baby spent time with me out in the yard, I slowly made it a point to gently pet the kitten with one finger as she was hanging around close to us, sniffing things; and sure enough, I slowly convinced the baby to start gently petting her with one finger too, and by about twenty minutes later I had even convinced them to take the leash and guide Mishi around the yard (with of course me close behind, just in case the cat got spooked about something and bolted). All this ties in to something bigger that's been going on around here recently than just Sunny, although related to Sunny as well, which is that we've been joking around here this summer about how I as a 56-year-old seem to have suddenly transitioned into Full Grandpa Mode this year, and that without warning my life has entirely become about cats and babies, babies and cats.

It's very rewarding, both socially and emotionally, so I'm happy to put in the time, which is why so much of my day around here now is taken up with taking multiple cats out for multiple walks, playing Bluetooth Keyboard Chaos* with the baby, getting Sunny to chase the mouse lure, taking him for his thrice-daily hallway prowls, and even more. It was especially fun today when those two worlds briefly came together.

*Bluetooth Keyboard Chaos: A game of the baby's invention, which involves stealing my Bluetooth keyboard, running across the kitchen with it, plunking down on the floor, and pounding on it with all their might while laughing uproariously.

October 2, 2025. Day 2 of Sunny's new outdoor adventures. I got smart this time and took him to the front porch, so that he couldn't hide in the underground stairwell the whole time like he did yesterday. Also, since the front porch has a bunch of comfortable chairs, I was able to really wait him out this time, and we ended up spending close to 45 minutes outside today. He was extremely uncomfortable for literally the first two-thirds of the time, and spent nearly all that time crouched up as close to the front door as he could possibly get; but then in the last 15 minutes he finally started warming up to the space, did a little wandering, and especially went over to the very edge of the porch railing so he could get the sun directly on his face, one of his favorite activities up in my room when my window is open. If history is any indication, Sunny should now have these first ten feet of the porch imprinted in his mind as "safe," so tomorrow will likely take those ten feet now for granted and perhaps venture out another ten feet.

It's time for a new bulk order of wet cat food today! This time we've switched to Blue Buffalo Wilderness Flaked Chicken and Trout (\$1.75 per 5.5 ounce can). We've tried Blue Buffalo before; but while last time we had just their regular mainstream line, this time with the Wilderness line we're trying their ultra-premium food, the kind with no grains (although it does have a bit of potato starch), and real animal parts listed instead of the gross generic "meat by-products" and "fish." Taking a cue from the success I've recently had with it, I'm continuing to mix half a can of this Blue Buffalo each meal with one half of the two-chambered Sheba food, which Sunny absolutely adores but doesn't contain enough solids to sustain him full-time. I'm now buying that on a subscription from Amazon, which brings it down to \$1 per double-chambered container; so added to the Blue Buffalo, I'm currently spending \$2.75 per day.

Interestingly, sometimes Sunny can tell when a brand-new type of food has arrived simply by looking at the still-closed can, and will get all excited, like today when he wouldn't even let me get the food out of the can and onto his plate, but started taking bites straight out of the can while I was trying to flip it. Or maybe it's that cats' sense of smell is so good, they can smell the new food straight through the sealed can? Whatever the case, he loves this stuff just as much as always, so we continue to be on the right track as far as making sure he eats every day and doesn't throw any of it up. We're at a place right now where I have several brands under my belt that pass the Sunny Test (including Blue Buffalo, Sheba, Whole Paws, Tiki Cat, and Purina ONE), so our days of trying out brand-new things might be slowing down or even stopping pretty soon; between the five brands now on the good list, and the ten different kinds of flavors each brand has, just these on their own will be enough to do an entire year of food without repeating.

October 4, 2025. My morning started with some chaos today, as I awoke to find five different piles of vomit on the floor, and Sunny nowhere to be found, despite my door being closed. Turns out (I think), during one of my several trips to the bathroom in the middle of the night that now mark my life as a 56-year-old man, he must have slipped by me and ran out the dark doorway into the dark hallway, and I was so tired that I didn't even notice. He usually doesn't do that, obsessively try to run out the door at moments he knows he's not supposed to, so I strongly suspect that Sunny's natural instincts kicked in after being so sick for so long; whenever cats are seriously sick, they're compelled to go hide away from the rest of the world as thoroughly as they can, so that a predator doesn't find them in their weakened condition and eat them up. (When I finally woke up at 8 a.m. and discovered him missing, I eventually found him under the bed of my housemate A., who lives on the exact opposite side and corner of the third floor as me, basically the absolute farthest he could get from the vomit.)

Like everything related to the medical condition of the cat, I don't know with 100 percent certainty what happened, but the contents of his vomit give a big clue; it was littered with undigested ivy leaves, which he managed to chomp down on before I could stop him during yesterday's time on the front porch, and sure enough, I looked it up this morning and learned that ivy is indeed toxic to cats. I know it's a fairly serious case because even when I've checked in with him throughout the day today, he not only hasn't wanted to be petted at all, he doesn't even want to be looked at, and even sitting down next to him to keep him company would result in him immediately standing up and moving to the other side of the room.

It would be easy to give this a human interpretation, and to say the cat's mad at me for locking him out of the room in the middle of the night, because this is exactly what it looks like to me as a human whenever he gives me a look of disdain as he saunters away today, anytime I try to commit the horrific crime of checking in to see how he's doing. That's why it's worth it to read the work of people like Galaxy, who can explain what's actually going on in a cat's mind when they behave in those ways, that it has literally nothing to do with you but is all about the cat feeling weak and vulnerable, and therefore instinctually trying to put as much space between himself and all other living creatures as possible.

That said, I really hate to see the little guy suffer like this, and it's had me in a very tender and emotional frame of mind today. When you care about a creature you're giving care to (pet, child, elderly parent), you have to go in for a pound if you're going to go in for a penny, because a deep sense of empathy and compassion for that creature must be adopted to get through all the work that's involved. So I don't mind feeling this deep concern for Sunny on days like today, and to take on some of his pain as my own, because I understand that that's the price for having a close relationship in the first place. It doesn't make it any easier, though, I have to confess.

October 7, 2025. I've resumed the renovation of my bedroom here at the co-op, which I originally began back in May to celebrate my fifth anniversary of moving in, but that all got put on hold when Sunny first moved into my room, about five weeks ago now. Yesterday, for example, after finally admitting that I was in way over my head with my new closet doors, the handyman I hired off Yelp showed up to do it for me. That meant I had to take Sunny out of the room altogether for a while; and my housemate D.'s room down on the first floor was the most convenient one to temporarily store him, although that's the same room where he stayed with his previous owner while she was going through her mental health crisis, so I was worried he was going to have the cat version of PTSD while in there by himself.

Thankfully he went through it just fine, helped this time by me bringing down his bed and several towels I've had bunched up around his favorite lounging spots, so that I could build a little cave for him under D.'s bed that strongly gave off the scent of himself, me, and home. Still, though, I don't think it's a coincidence that he was extra snuggly last night, not only wanting more petting time than usual in the evening but also spooning against me for most of the night. (I sleep on my side, so when I first go to bed and then again before I wake up, Sunny curls up in a C and then backs all the way up so his back is against my chest; but I also toss and turn a lot in my sleep, so he's learned by now that for most of the night, he's best off sleeping on the far edge of the mattress, where he won't get an errant hand in the face at three in the morning.)

As far as the closet doors themselves, he's still taking some time getting used to that; he's not accustomed to his litterbox being hemmed in with a third wall like that, and he's been getting scared of the space every so often, which manifests in Sunny's case by him doing zoomies back and forth across the length of my room several times, then stuffing himself into a tiny space between my couch back and my wall, which is a pain in the ass to get into which is why he only does it when he perceives an emergency. It once again reminds me of the similarities sometimes between caring for a cat and caring for an elderly person with dementia, how both of them freak out when any change is introduced to their usual routine; if my 81-year-old mother had been capable of doing zoomies around her assisted-living apartment when we began the discussion about getting rid of some of Dad's things after his death, that's absolutely what she would have done, and as it was she did pretty much the verbal version of it. The big difference, though, is that with a cat, you can say, "I know you don't like it, but I have thumbs and you don't, so unfortunately this is what's going to happen, and you're just going to have to suffer through it until you get used to it, which I as the human know you'll do soon."

Since I've decided to put off painting my room until next spring, I don't actually have that much left to finish the rest of the renovation; now that the closet doors are done, I'll be constructing my new loft bed, then replacing some old furniture with some new pieces, getting a runner rug for the center of my long and narrow room, getting a plastic mat to go under my rolling desk chair, putting the bookcases back in their correct positions, then taking everything I own back down from the attic storage space where it's been for the last five months. Sunny will have to suffer through all of it, so here's hoping he does so with a maximum of grace and a minimum of zoomies.

November 1, 2025. Yesterday we finished up Sunny's bulk order of the Blue Buffalo and started in on the second order of Purina ONE (I had to buy two orders of it at once back in September to be eligible for free shipping at Amazon), so I thought I'd use that as an excuse to get caught up on the events of the last four weeks, since I've gotten out of the habit of writing in this journal.

To begin with, as a bookkeeping note, let me mention that the kitten Mishi is no longer with us, but rather has been adopted by his new forever family. To be honest, my housemate technically never should have taken in a kitten in the first place, because she herself is battling a fairly serious disease right now that is taking up every bit of her money and time; but like many of us reluctant cat guardians, she simply couldn't turn Mishi away when she showed up on our porch one night, hungry and sick, so she really put in some heroic measures to keep Mishi fed, healthy, safe, and happy at the same time she was going through painful and expensive medical treatments herself. And speaking of which, we accidentally learned Mishi's origin a few weeks ago too. Once while hanging out with her on her leash on the front steps of our co-op, a couple of little girls from down the street walked by with their grandmother, and they got all excited because Mishi turned out to originally be their cat; but as the grandmother quietly explained to us away from the girls' ears, their mother just wasn't into the cat at all, and finally one day announced that the kitten had "gotten out" and "run away" (code for "the mom abandoned the kitten on the sidewalk and then lied to her daughters about it"), and Mishi had essentially been living in our block's trees and yards for several weeks before finally approaching us one night on our porch in desperation. Godspeed, Mishi; may your current residence finally be your true forever home.

Since my last journal entry, all my remaining furniture from my bedroom renovation has now been assembled and installed, and I'm relieved to say that Sunny is absolutely loving it. Remembering Galaxy's advice about how most cats are instinctually wired to get up off the ground level as much as possible, I set everything up in a way so that Sunny can now do a full unencumbered walk all the way around the entirety of my room without ever needing to go down to the floor, the highlight being my loft bed a full six feet up in the air, the highest platform Sunny has now ever had at his disposal. (To remind you, the ceilings in our weird old former boarding house are eleven feet tall.)

I'm glad for all of this, because I honestly didn't know how Sunny would react to all this new furniture being put into place, and all my usual stuff being brought down from attic storage and put back into their usual positions again. I'm grateful that he seems to be really thriving from the new layout, and especially that he loves using my new loft frame as essentially a private jungle gym. (Underneath the mattress is a U-shaped workstation with two sets of shelves, stacked vertically; I purposely keep the bottom U clear so that Sunny can walk its entire length, where on one end he can easily hop over to my new dresser, then pivot and make another hop up to my bed, while on the other side of the room he can easily hop up on my couch, then up to the top of my bookcases, then over to the other side of the bed.) He sleeps with me at the very top every single night now, and doesn't have the slightest amount of problems with hopping back and forth between there and ground level multiple times over the course of the night. Things are finally feeling like a permanent home for him around here for the first time, one of the several reasons I've gotten out of the habit of journaling the last several weeks.

Unfortunately, the same can't be said about our excursions outdoors with the harness and leash; after trying it several more times since my last entry, and Sunny being traumatized by the outdoors just as much as he'd been all the other times, I finally gave up for the time being,

especially since we've now moved into the kind of autumn weather that makes it too cold to loiter outside for too long. In fact, I made a quiet realization about all this that has profoundly affected our third-floor prowling, which is that I realized I don't actually have to shut the stairwell doors whenever letting him out of my room, because he's too much of a fraidy-cat to go down them anyway (with an important exception, but more on that in a moment). That now makes it much easier to let him out of my room for a bit, whenever he's in the mood for it; instead of having to do a big preparation beforehand, I can simply open my door and let him run out, which has inspired me to do so a lot more often than before, basically anytime he goes up to the bedroom door and scratches on it.

That's led to one of two big new realizations about this subject, that it's not so much that Sunny enjoys going out for one big prowl of his territory during mealtimes, but rather that he enjoys going out for a short prowl every 45 minutes all evening long, where like a small-town sheriff he goes out just long enough to take a look around and make sure there's no trouble brewing, before he then goes in for another 45 minutes of grooming, sleeping, or cuddling before it's time to do another patrol. (Just like Galaxy talks about in *Total Cat Mojo*, Sunny spends the day essentially sleeping for eight hours, building up the energy for these evening patrols, and so doesn't really want to leave the room at all before sunset, even when he's given a chance to.) Each of those short patrols is only five minutes of my time, and it's good for me to stand up from my computer every 45 minutes and get in five minutes of light exercise too, so for now I've been indulging him basically each and every time he wants to go out and do a little check of the territory again, since now it's no more difficult than simply opening my door and grabbing my phone. That has both him and me very happy these days and, along with the mealtime rituals I had already been doing (the hunting with the mouse lure, the timing of this with the sunset, etc.), has Sunny sleeping deeply and contently through the night, which has been a big priority of mine ever since getting him back in August.

And then the other big realization about all this has been that, once I stopped forcing Sunny to go downstairs, he eventually got up the courage to start voluntarily doing so himself, and now pretty much every night makes an extended visit (twenty-plus minutes) to the second floor and all the new sights and smells there, and has even gotten up the courage a couple of times now to go all the way down to the first floor and main thoroughfare, where the majority of the house's residents can be found at any given moment. And again, there's been some fascinating things to learn about the specific times he enjoys doing this, something I didn't even see Galaxy ever talk about in any of his books; namely, even though the stairwells are open and accessible all day and all evening, he pointedly stays clear of them then, but it's only starting around 9 p.m. and later that he gets a hankering to go exploring around the other floors. This has led me to theorize that during their hunting times of sunrise and sunset, a cat wants to stick very closely to its established territory, where it knows all the little hiding spaces where a mouse might try to run and get away, and also knows that no other cats will be invading that territory while it's busy trying to track down dinner; but it's in the middle of the night, precisely when it's darkest out, that a cat is instinctually driven to *expand* their territory, and to go exploring new adjacent spaces at a time when they're most naturally hidden and safe from bigger predators they might unexpectedly encounter in that new space.

I'm really trying to encourage Sunny as much as possible to be exploring and getting comfortable with the rest of the house, so I'm indulging him for however long he might want to spend down on the second and first floors, even though by definition this is always happening right before I'm heading to bed and I'm pretty tired myself. (In fact, if he was a freely roaming

cat, I strongly suspect he'd be doing most of this new exploring in the middle of the night, which would explain why so many homeowners complain about their cats doing zoomies at exactly this time.) With any luck, by the time the warm weather starts up again next spring, Sunny will be very comfortable with wandering down to the front door of the house all by himself, at which point I can simply slip on his leash there at the door and we can head straight outside.

And speaking of outside, we had this really lovely experience a couple of weeks ago, when my friend Carrie went out of town and invited Sunny to go on "vacation" over there while she was gone, by which I mean the two of us went over and housesat for five days. There were two huge pluses over there when it came to Sunny, which is that for starters, her condo is of course much larger than my single bedroom, so the cat had the chance to really stretch out, do some running, and hop from room to room without any supervision, which he clearly enjoyed. More importantly, Carrie also has a really nice outdoor back porch, that very typical Chicago kind with the wooden slats (check out Jim Gordon's back porch in *Batman Begins* if you don't know what I'm talking about); and Carrie has had cats in and out of her life for decades now (she's not only owned several but has also been a foster for Hyde Park Cats for many years), and so she's fully catproofed her porch so that pets can freely roam around out there without worrying that they'll get loose and lost.

That was amazing for Sunny, and for the first couple of days there, he spent nearly every free moment of the day and evening outside on the porch, until the weather finally turned nasty enough that we could no longer do so. But there was a big lesson learned with all of this as well, which is that around day 4 of our five-day vacation, Sunny was clearly feeling anxious about getting back to his well-marked and well-known territory, and was seeming more and more unhappy about being in this new environment that smelled so strongly of Other Cats Besides Him. (Also, instead of taking a tiny Uber ride, I just put him in his backpack carrier and walked the 25 minutes across the neighborhood back to home when the housesitting was over; that didn't go over well with Sunny at all, and he ended up defecating on himself inside the carrier at some point before the trip was over. Poor fellow!) So with those lessons learned, we'll absolutely be taking advantage of Carrie's further offers next year to come over, but in the future we'll only be doing so for two days at a time, and always while taking an Uber or a bus there and back.

Looking back at it all today, I realize my life is so incredibly different now than it had even been in July, much less at the beginning of the year when my dad died and I got in over my head with my freelancing, and everything was terrible and felt sometimes like it would never get better. It's tempting to say that I'm an incredibly lucky person, but luck has nothing to do with it; I've in fact spent an insane amount of time, money, and energy to deliberately make these relationships happen and thrive, not only my one with Sunny but then the goodwill I extend to the entire rest of the co-op as a result, and they're only as rewarding as they are because I'm determined to put in the work to make them that rewarding. I'm very lucky to have Sunny in my life, for sure, but I'm also self-aware enough to give myself a pat on the back about it all too.

Good job, Jason. It's been a lot of work, but it's all now paying off. You've made a creature's life on this planet a lot better than it would've been if you hadn't been there, and that's worth celebrating. Now off to clean up some vomit!



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Jason Pettus is a freelance book editor, specializing in self-publishing genre authors who release their titles through Kindle Unlimited. Before that he was the founder of the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography, which over a ten-year period in the 2000s and '10s published forty books for collective distribution of 20,000 copies, and was named one of the top ten indie presses in the United States by both BookRiot.com and *Poets & Writers* magazine. Before that he was a self-publishing novelist and slam poet himself, and among other accolades was featured on National Public Radio, the Canadian Broadcasting Channel, WGN-TV, and the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, as well as taking second place (as part of the Green Mill team) at the 1997 National Poetry Slam. When not busy in the literary world, Pettus enjoys nerdy deep dives into the history of classical music, science-fiction worldbuilding as a hobby, and serious attempts at restaurant-quality homemade bread. He lives in fellowship with twenty other housemates at the Bowers House co-op, in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago.