

*“I found assorted websites that declare a Texas tabby named Dusty to be the champion kitten-birther.”*

Larry  
POWELL



## On feline genealogy

Here’s a question: How many cats are there in America? You’d probably need algebra *and* calculus to figure that out.

I recently saw on a website ([www.catscans.com](http://www.catscans.com)) that around 35,000 kittens are born a day in the United States. I couldn’t tell how authoritative that was or who counts them, but it seems low. There must be at least 35,000 people in the county who don’t give a hoot about spay and neuter.

In doing research I found assorted websites that declare a Texas tabby named Dusty to be the champion kitten-birther. Dusty, depending on the source, was 17 or 18 years old by 1952 when she retired after delivering 420 kittens.

Seriously, who starts counting kittens and keeps a record? Of course, they had time to do this in 1952—only three TV channels, no cell phones, and just one war, Korea. One online source says Dusty hailed from Bonham. Dusty may be at the top of a lot of North Texas cat family trees.

Whether it’s 35,000 kittens a day or 420 in a lifetime, that’s still a lot of “Free Kittens” signs. Heck, 35,000 kittens a day is just about one cat for every resident of Coppell.

Relax, they aren’t all in Coppell. Some are in Oak Cliff. Some in the Park Cities. Some on college campuses, car lots, in alleys, on parking lots—all over the place.

If you did a census, some folks would check the “no cats” box—but there are plenty of us who have more than “no cats”—sometimes *beaucoup* more than “no cats.”

This reminds me. Here are some cat magnets: the warm top of a video player, a window sill with a sunny exposure, a heating pad, an open magazine, an open book, a keyboard that has two hands typing on it. A lap. A closed cabinet door. An open cabinet door.

And, if a person is in a recliner, the top of a human head makes a good spot to curl up and purr, I’m told by my catmagnet-spouse Martha. We’re working on a prototype for a catnap helmet.

The ultimate cat magnet is the human heart. You’ve

probably known people who declared “I am a dog person” then discovered they’re a “cat person,” too.

Some of us have multi-species households. As of this writing, we have seven dogs and four cats, but it’s only noon. None of ours came from a pet store. They were all unexpected. And we have not kept all that we found.

For example, mid-October evenings were cool and the sky was “autumn dark”—not the half-light of summer nights a few weeks earlier. My literate-spouse Martha and I had been in Arlington at the annual American Association of University Women Book Fair. (Our AAUW pal Diane Feldman, coincidentally, has a cat named Martha.)

When human Martha piloted her minivan down our street, the headlights flashed on a warmly dressed young man walking toward us along the curb and talking on a cell phone. Martha yelled, “Look, there’s a kitten!” Sure enough, a tiny gray kitten skulked along behind the pedestrian.

Martha did a *Starsky & Hutch* sliding stop and I

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Paul Hart photo

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jumped out and asked the startled man, “Is this your kitten?” With alarm, he replied, “What kitten?” I pointed and he said, “Not my cat” and kept moving.

Meanwhile, the kitten dashed under the van. When I raced (using the word loosely) to the other side, the rascal ran up to me and stopped. I picked up this tiny baby—probably weighed 8 ounces, most of it ears, tail, and whiskers.

The lighting was bad that night and I’d gotten only a glimpse of the skulking gray kitten. But what I think I saw was a diminutive kitten stalking a six-foot-tall pedestrian. I think I detected a look I’ve seen in nature films—the look on the leopard when it grabs its prey and pulls it up into a nearby tree. I think that is what the kitten was planning. Kittens believe they are giants.

The next day we took the kitten to our family doctor, Vladi de Jong at Vet Stop in North Oak Cliff. Because all patients need a name, I listed “Curby” for the curbside kitten.

As you may know, kittens are notorious for hiding their gender from amateurs. Curby is a name that fits either. Dr. de Jong, who knows his way around a cat, said the Stalking Kitten is a girl. She became Curby Jo Spike—Spike was in honor of our late gray cat, Spike, the bossy Felix Unger of cats. Whenever anything was out of place in Martha’s bathroom—hairbrush on the counter, for example—Spike stood by it and yowled until it was moved.

That’s just one example of the inexplicability of cats.

Another inexplicability is pinning down where Curby Jo came from—a lone kitten on a chilly night in a neighborhood where trap, neuter, and release has been successful in curbing, so to speak, the kitten output.

We may not know where Curby Jo came from, but we know where she’s landed.

She’s living with a young gray rescue cat named Lola and Katy Langley, Martha’s colleague at the World Affairs Council of Dallas/Fort Worth. Lola

and Curby became quick pals, though Lola, early on, became possessive of Katy.

Near as we can tell, Curby Jo never fails to charm. We fostered her for several days and she even charmed our dogs and cats—a tough crowd for a newcomer.

Now, it may not be unusual to see wandering cats around here, but it is uncommon to find a well-behaved, friendly, tiny kitten stalking a man with a cell phone. Maybe she was just planning to borrow the phone and call for a cab. Who knows?

We’re glad we got Curby Jo out of trouble. And we know that, when she’s old enough, steps will be taken to *keep* her out of “trouble.”

This is the only way we want this cat to get lucky. So many kittens don’t benefit from the good fortune of being caught in the right headlights. Many wind up in dire spots in shelters. Things are tough for those kittens. After all, the prevailing theory of solving animal problems in Texas is simple: Kill it.

Since finding homes for all these cats is impossible, the thing is to shut off the supply. Spay and neuter. A lecture series to cats on feline abstinence just won’t work. It’s getting people to care enough to spay and neuter that is both necessary and so tough to do.

Remember, the Metroplex Animal Coalition has inexpensive spay/neuter services and its website, [www.metroplexanimalcoalition.com](http://www.metroplexanimalcoalition.com), has a raft of listings for such programs. Give the info to your head-scratching neighbor who complains. “I don’t know why, but Kitty gets pregnant about twice a year.”

Some of these people don’t need a spay/neuter video—what they need is a copy of “The Birds & Bees For Dummies.”

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