Speck

=^.^=

A sweet kitten who graced our presence from July 2000 to November 2013.

by Kari Quaas, guardian / friend

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Cover Photo: Speck on our bed in Seattle, WA.
Back Cover Photo: The sunset on the day she died, November 17, 2013, in Everett, WA.

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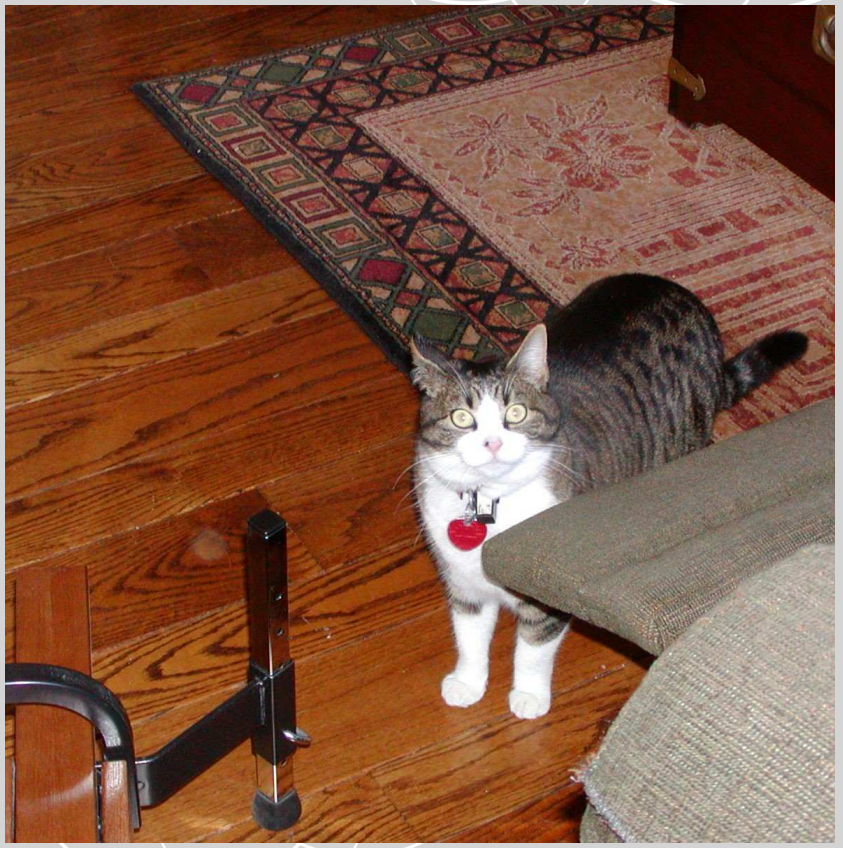
How does one sum up 13 years of furry goodness with a beloved pet? I'm going to try and do that here. Speck was such a well documented cat, and my love for her is soul deep. I'm grateful to have known, and been loved, by this sweet, loving, trusting, and gentle being.

Here's to Speck, Munchkin, Little One, Sweet Pea, Baby Girl, Speckie, Lil Chunk, Kitty Loaf, Opportunist, My Girl.... You are dearly missed.

Seattle, Washington
2000-2010



Speck came into my life in November 2000, when, on a trip to the shelter in Kent, Washington to view a border collie, we instead went home with 2-for-1 cats.

Speck and her brother Crash, both four months old, were in kitty jail together and were purring the loudest. Thankfully, my husband of two years, Nate, pushed to get them over the little gray kittens. We signed the adoption paperwork with them tumbling around the office like one big ball of fur. The ride home, post in carrier box yeowing, was full of curious kittens wondering where life was taking them. They ended up in RavennaLeaf, a neighborhood in North Seattle, WA, at our recently purchased home.

And so begins our story.

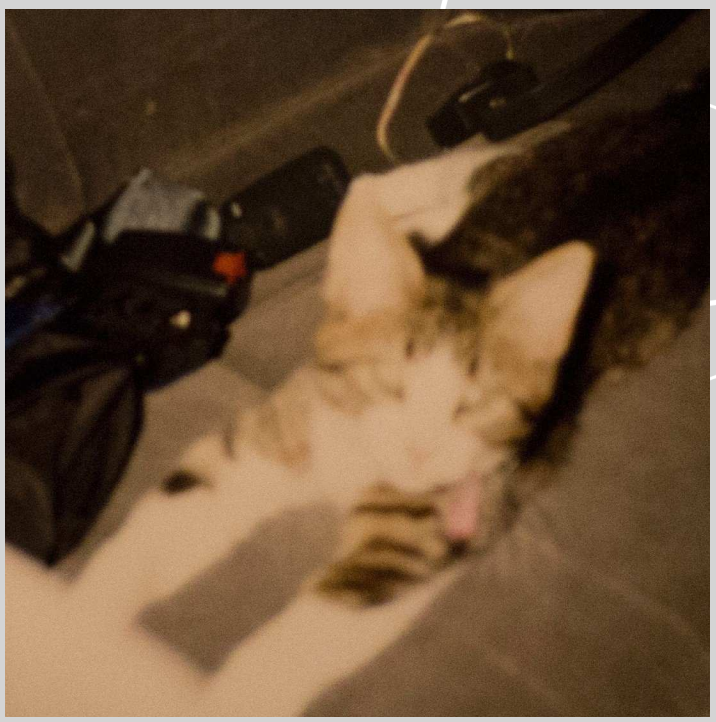
"The smallest feline is a masterpiece."

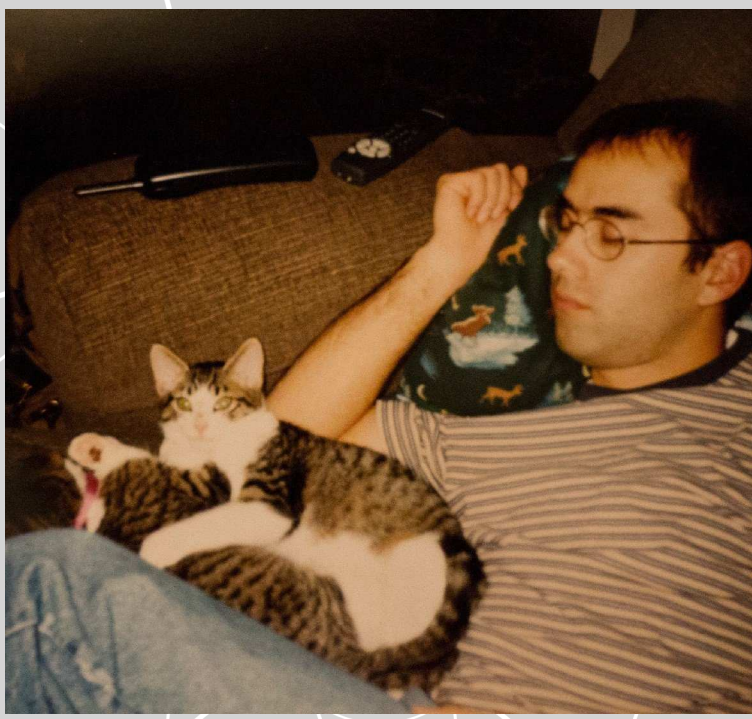
~ Leonardo da Vinci

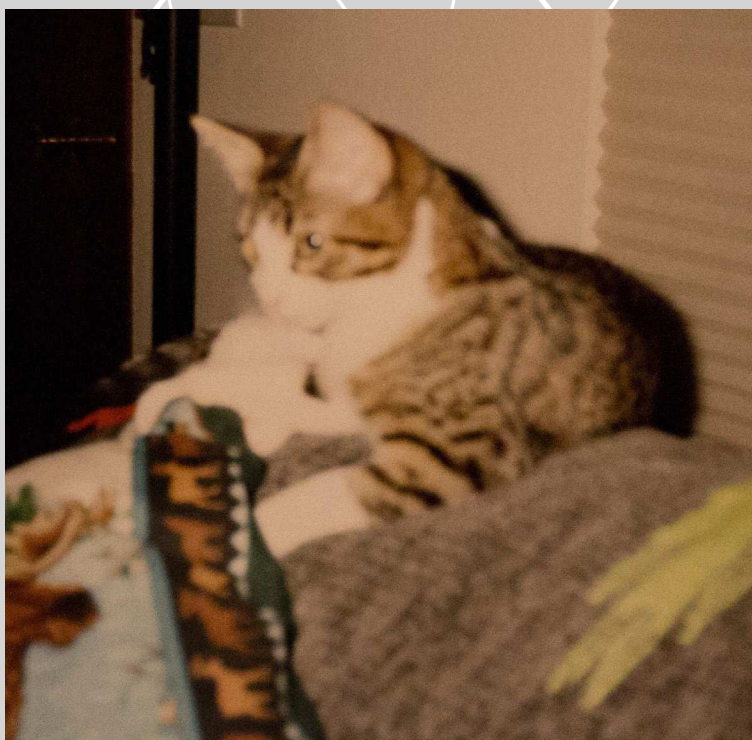
These photos were taken with FILM! We got these cats before the digital age. ;-)

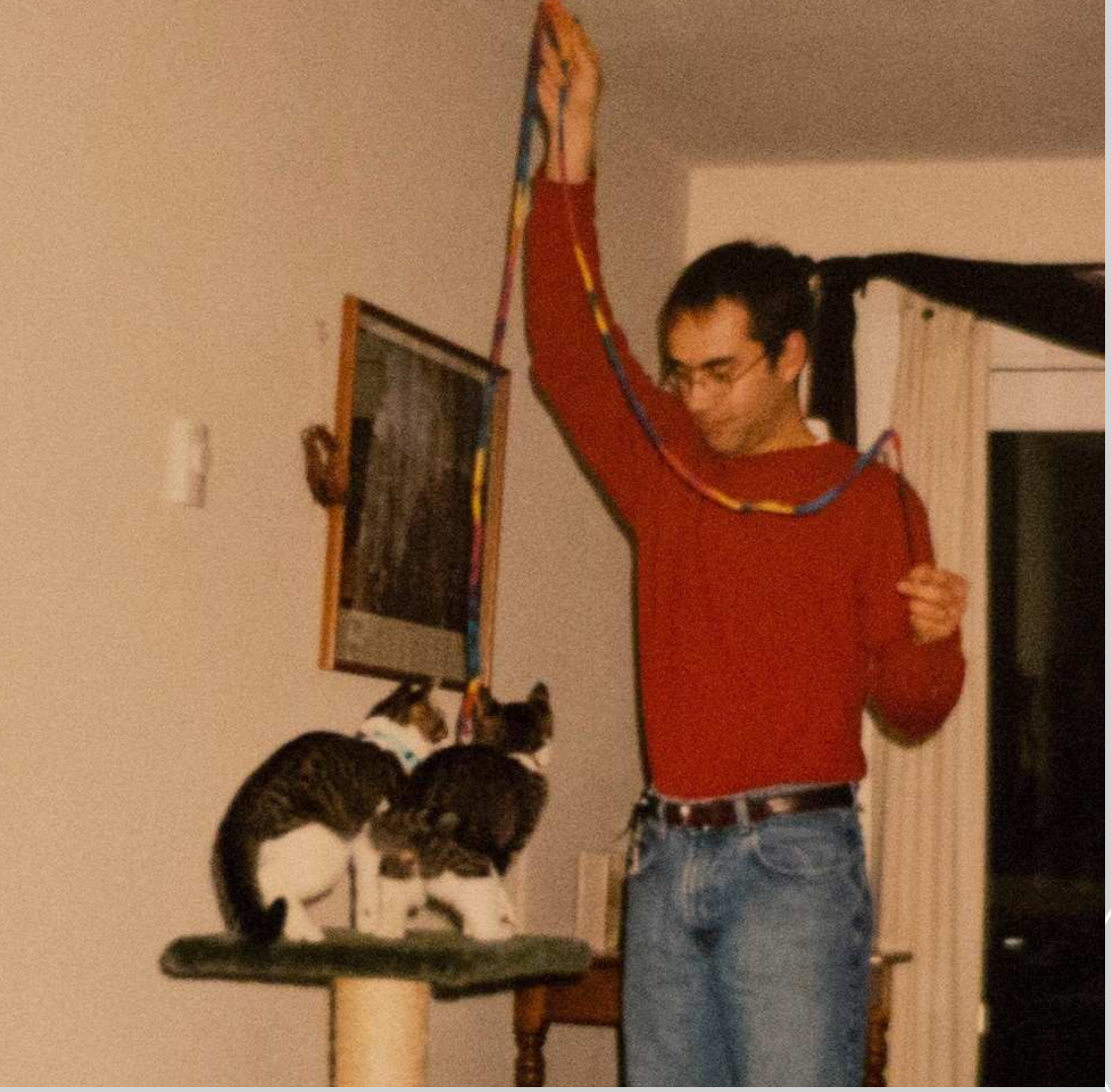
This is how I imagine them when I think back on the first year they were with us - a tumble of fur, cozy together, and playful.

I'm pretty sure that Speck digested some of that rainbow-colored, fleece string....



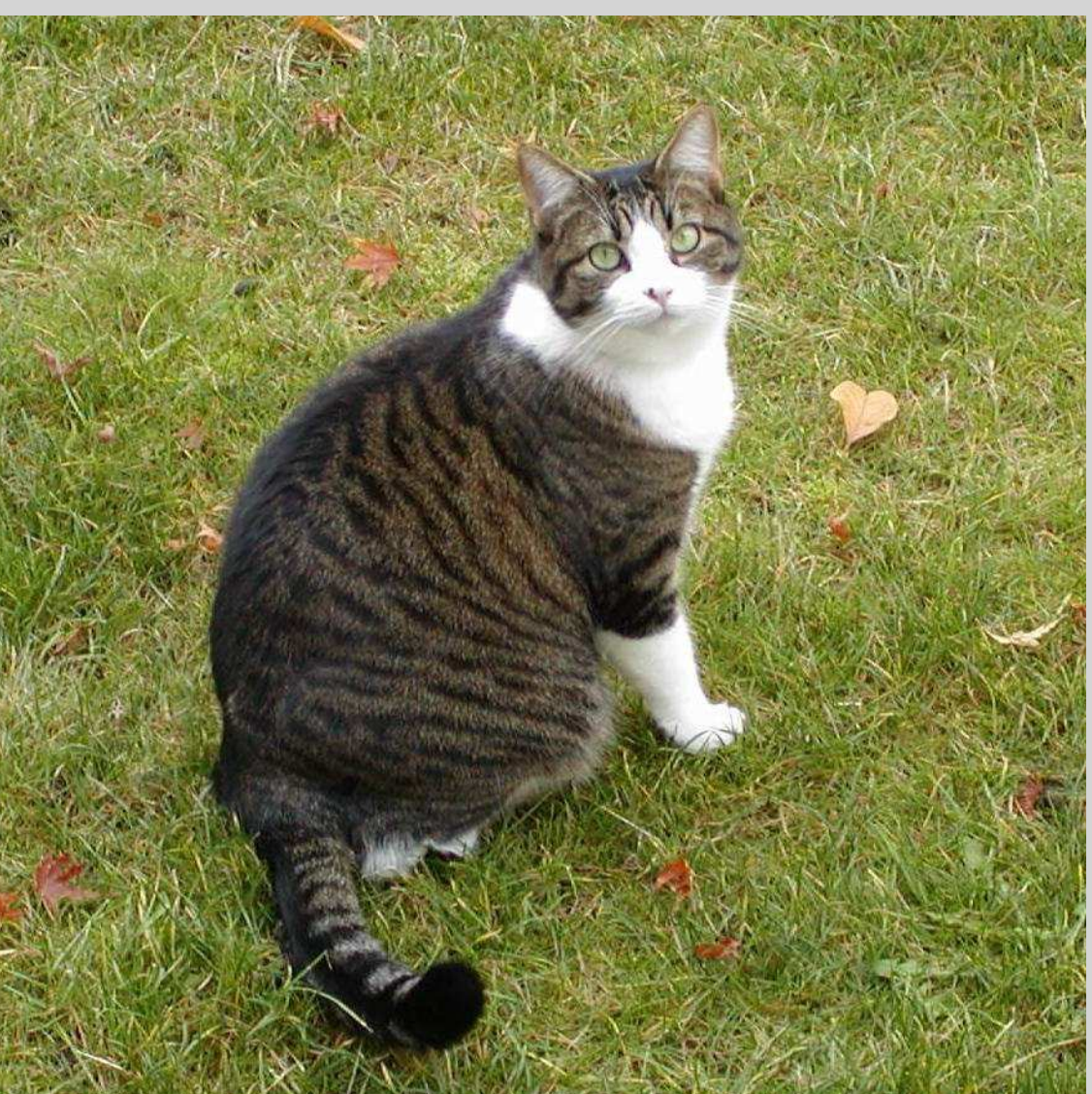






Speck =^.^=

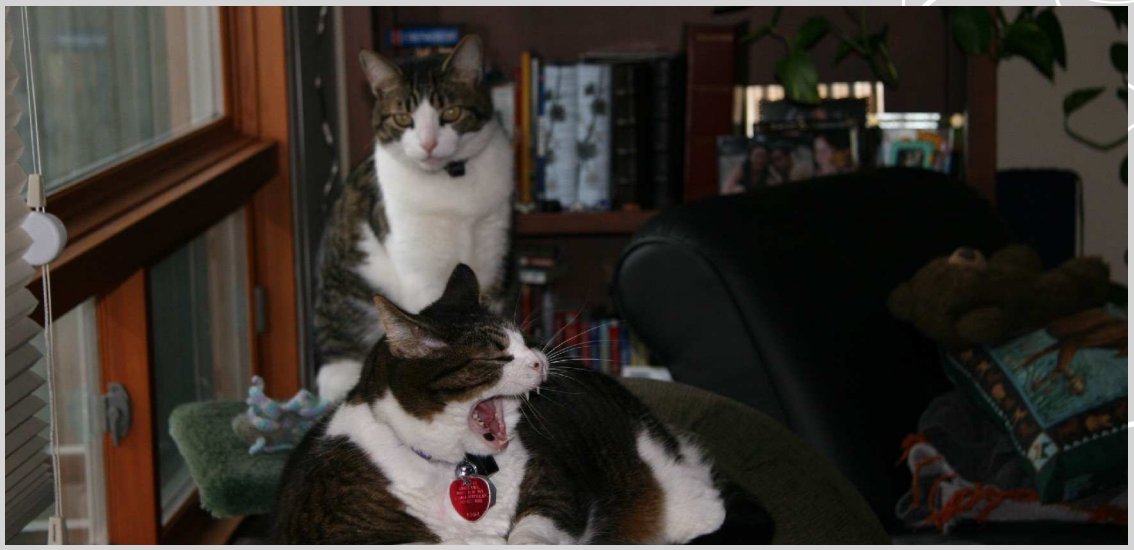
Speck and her brother Crash (aka Buddy)

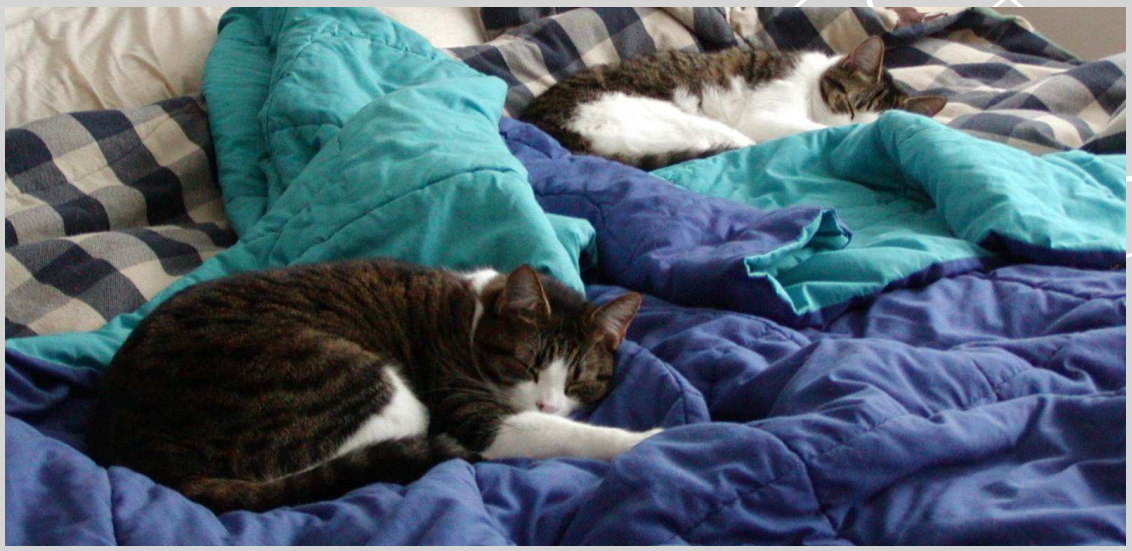


Based on Speck's behavior, we suspected that she was the older sister and Crash was the younger brother. She ate first. She occasionally bathed her brother. They definitely had a love-hate relationship, but I suppose that's how it is for most siblings. They were a cute pair.

From a distance they looked the same - black and brown striped fur with ring-tails, white highlights, triangle heads, and blessed by the Mother Mary. Upon closer inspection, Crash was longer and leaner. Speck was built for comfort and not for speed. And of course, she had the speck on her nose.

Her name was from her obvious facial feature.

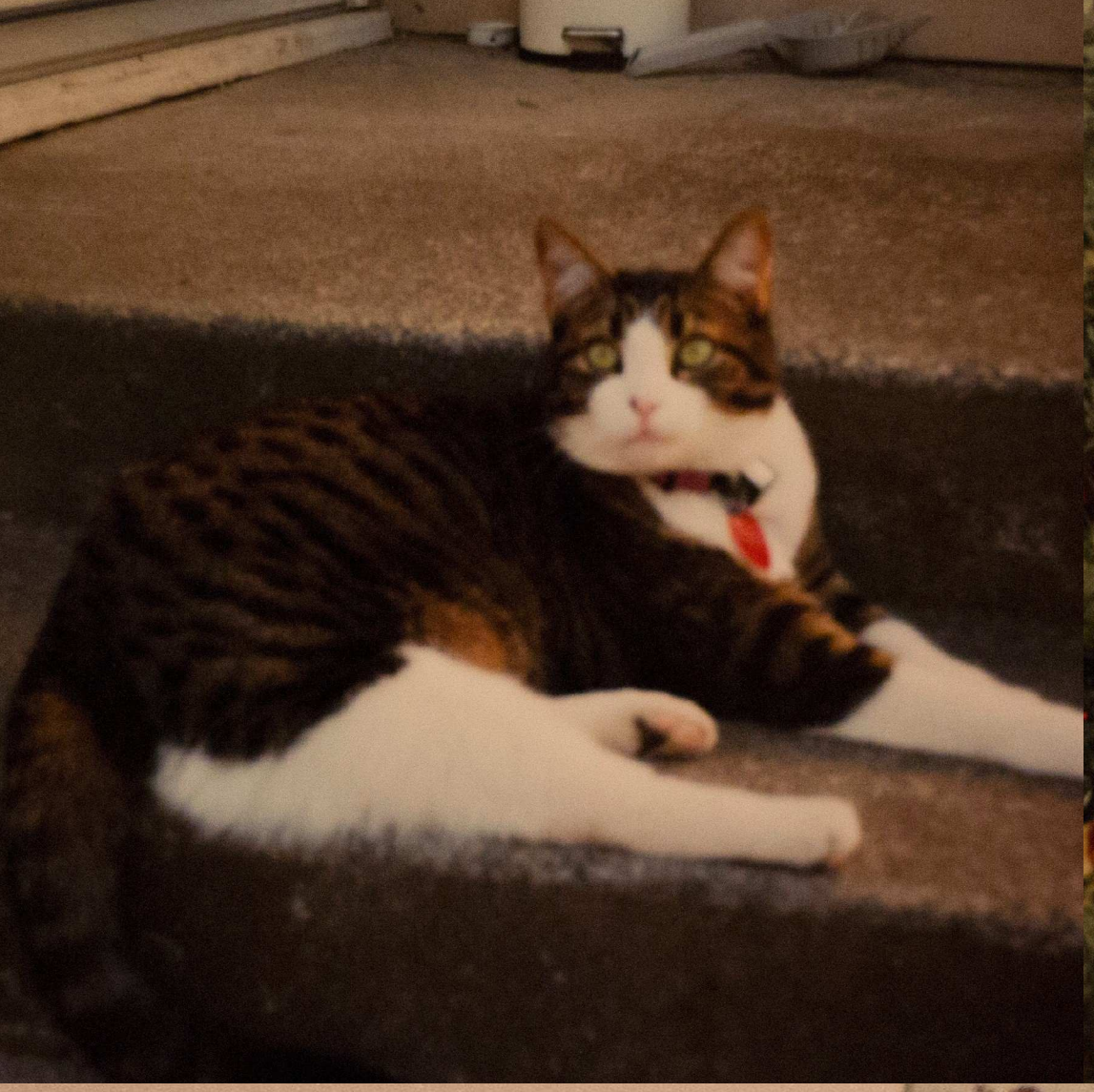




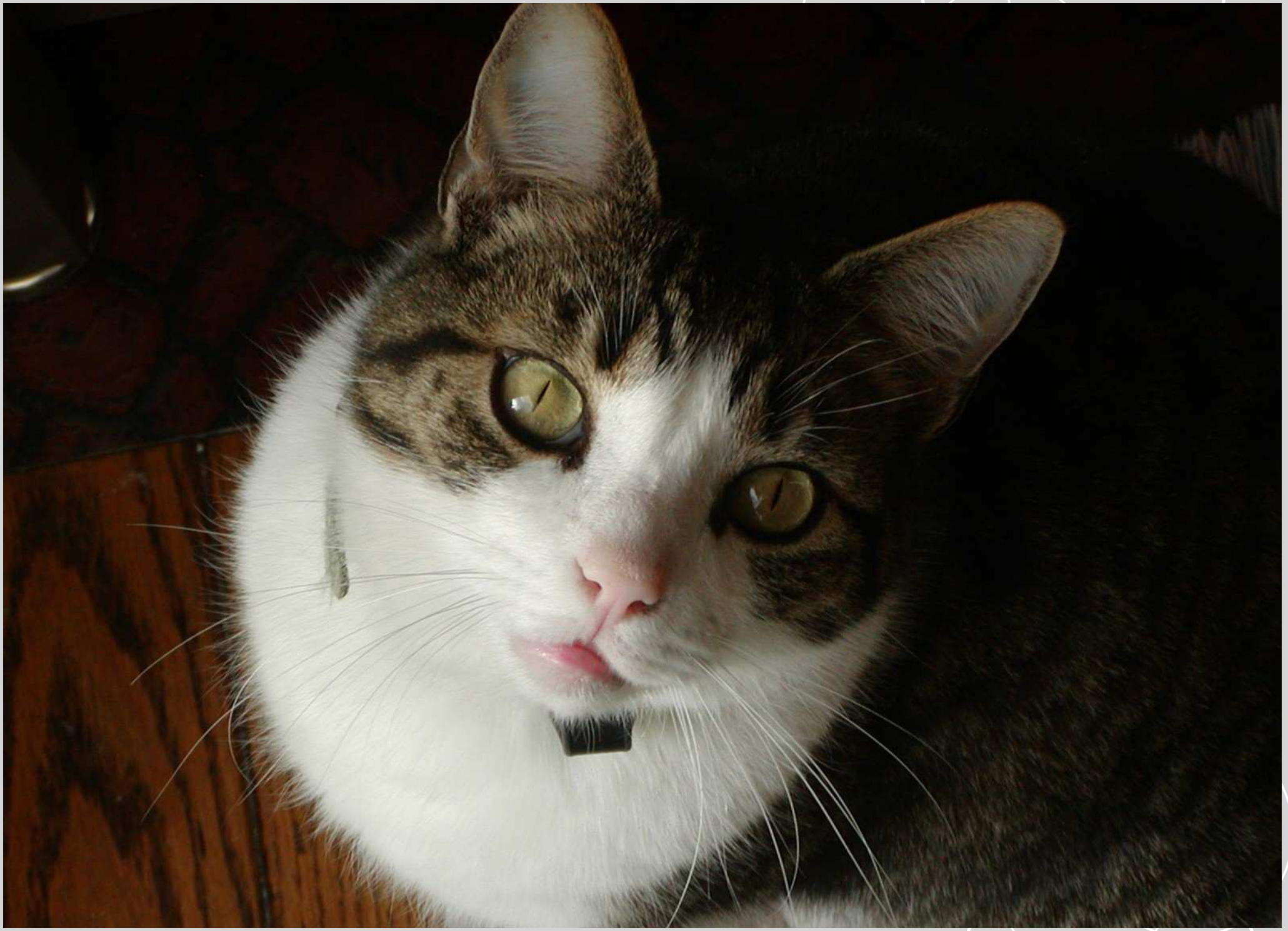
Crash's name was earned through actions. Shortly after his arrival, he jumped up onto the plant table and was sitting in my anthurium plant's container. I shrieked. He, like a Warner Bros. cartoon character, jumped straight up in the air, ran as fast as he could forwards, and then when he tried to stop on the slippery wood floors, did the four paw slide instead. He ran face first into the baseboard heater.

Nate and I continued whatever we were doing and then after a while realized that the cat hadn't reappeared. He was hiding underneath the couch, face and paws covered in blood, with his nose in the air. He literally crashed. Our friend, Shelby, thought of the name. It stuck.

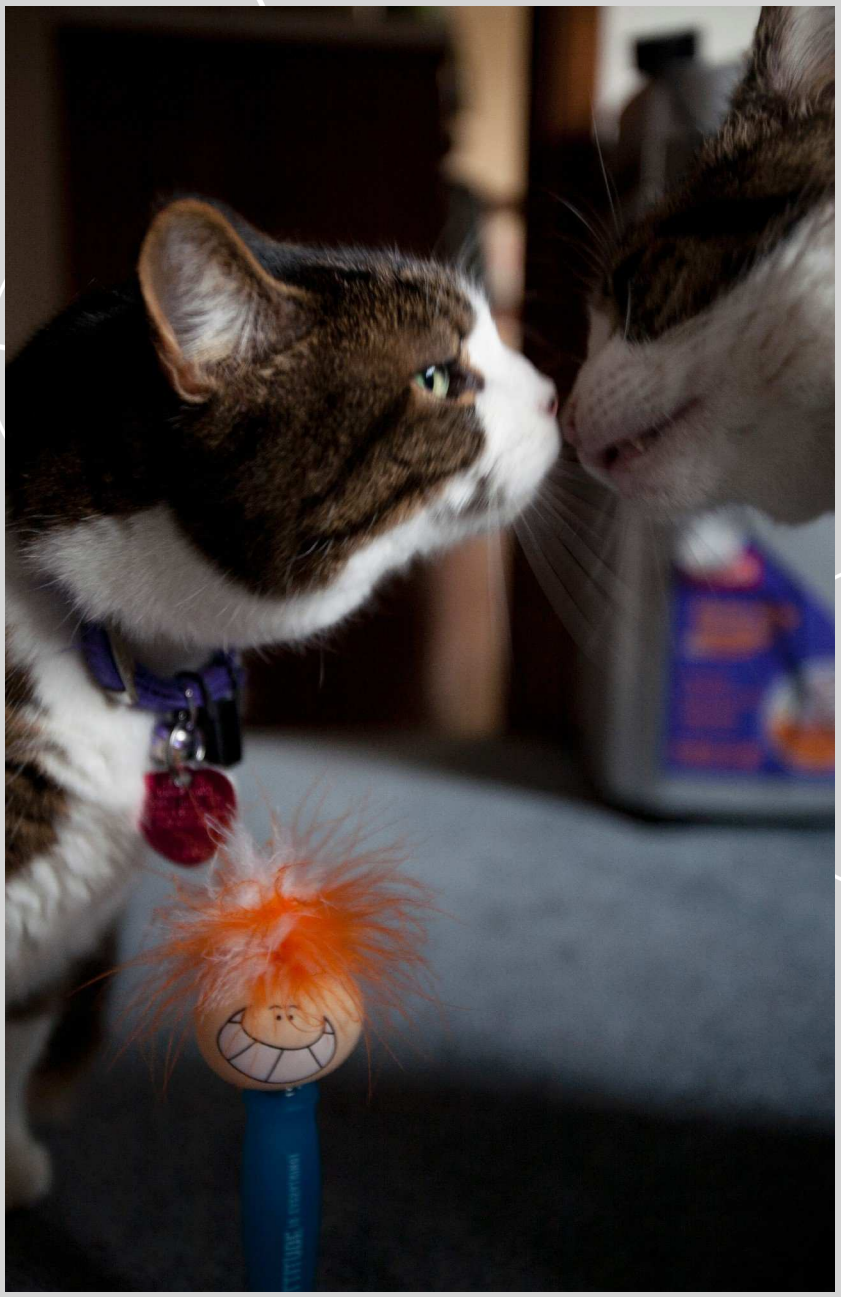
Informally, we also called him The Bud or Buddy.



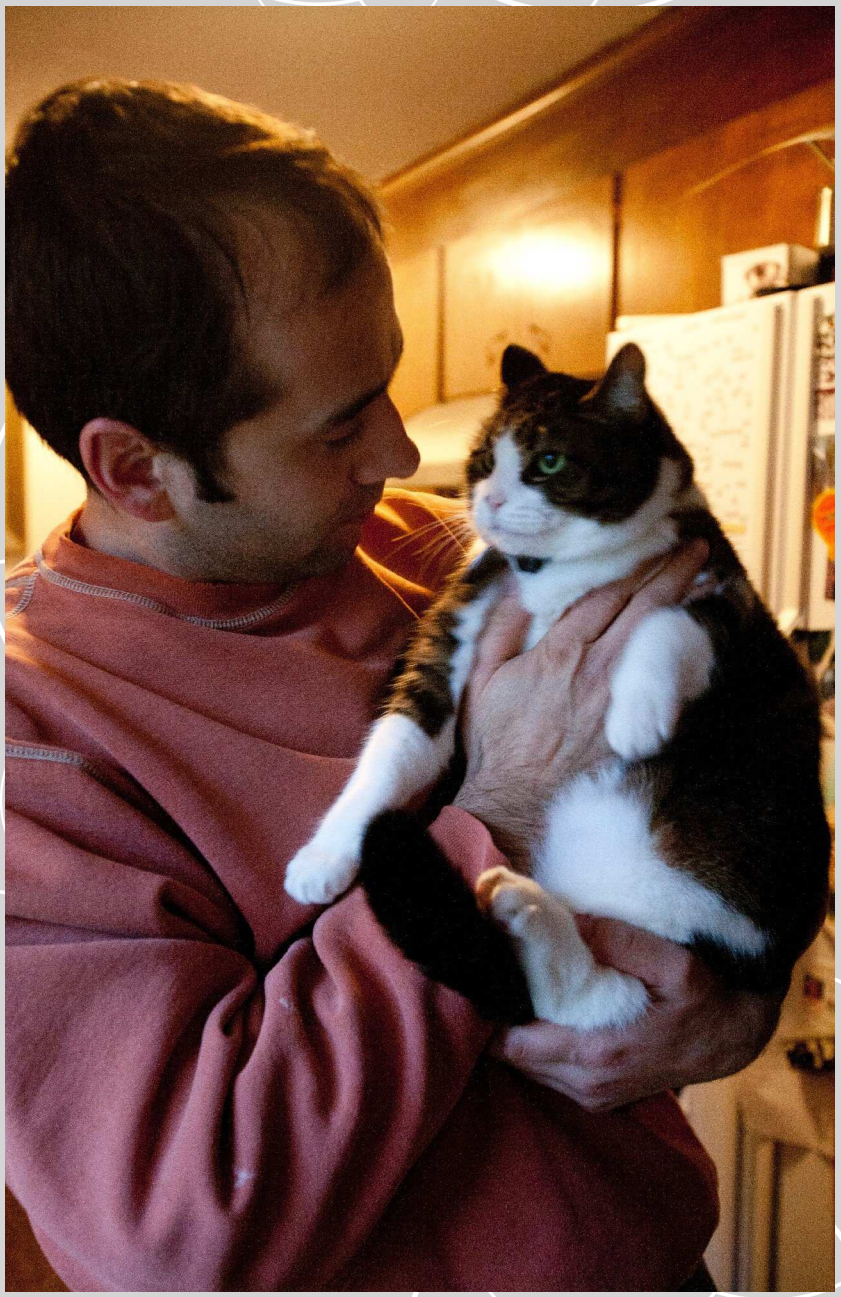
Just some cute photos of my girl. She was always curious, liked boxes and loved her people.



The Buddy



A rare sweet moment between the siblings.



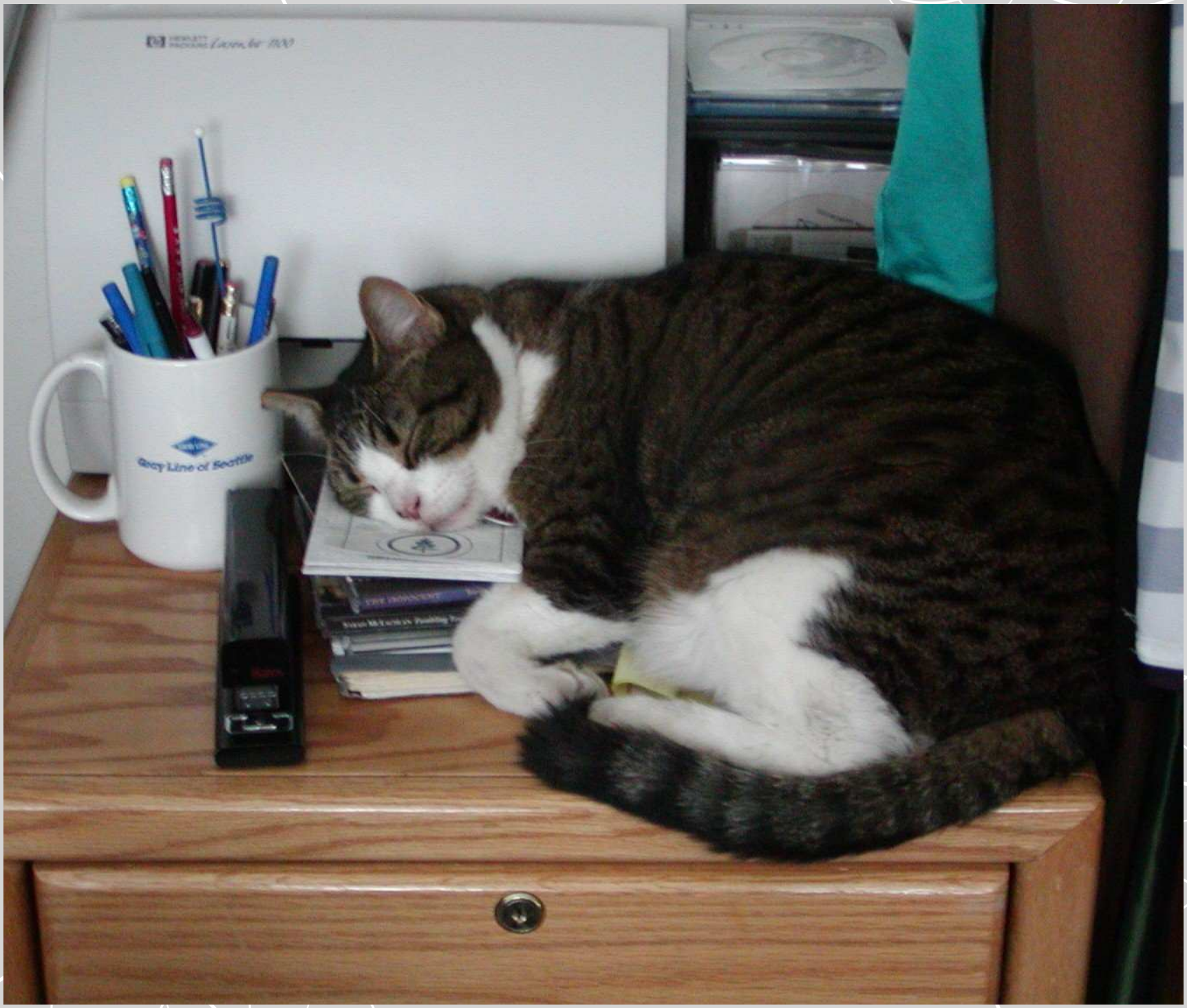
Nate and Speckie

“I believe cats to be spirits come to earth. A cat, I am sure, could walk on a cloud without coming through.”

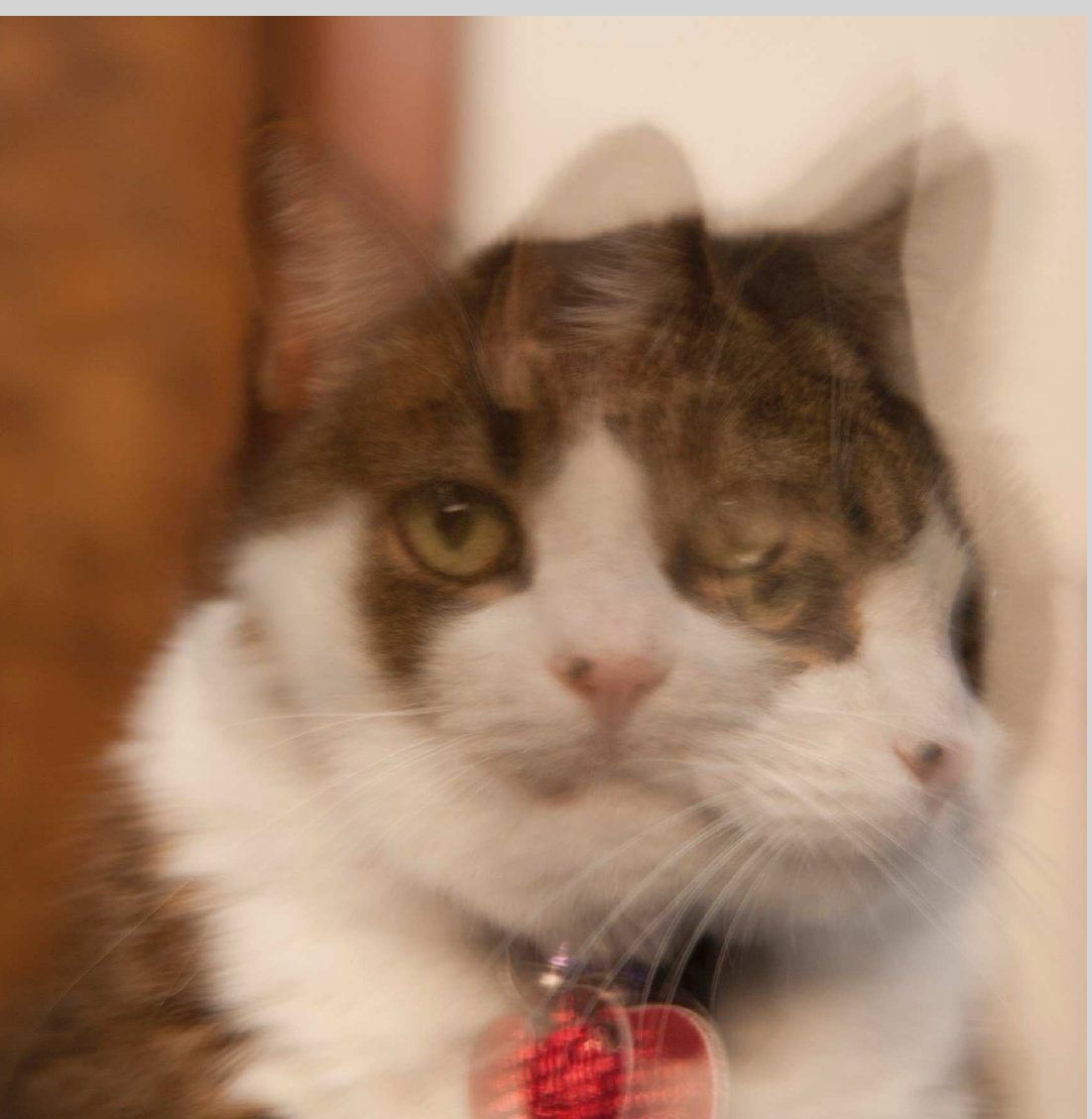
~ Jules Verne

“Cats make one of the most satisfying sounds in the world: they purr. [...] Almost all cats make us feel good about ourselves because they let us know they feel good about us, about themselves, and about our relationship with them. A purring cat is a form of high praise, like a gold star on a test paper. It is a reinforcement of something we would all like to believe about ourselves -- that we are nice.”

— Roger A. Caras,
A Celebration Of Cats



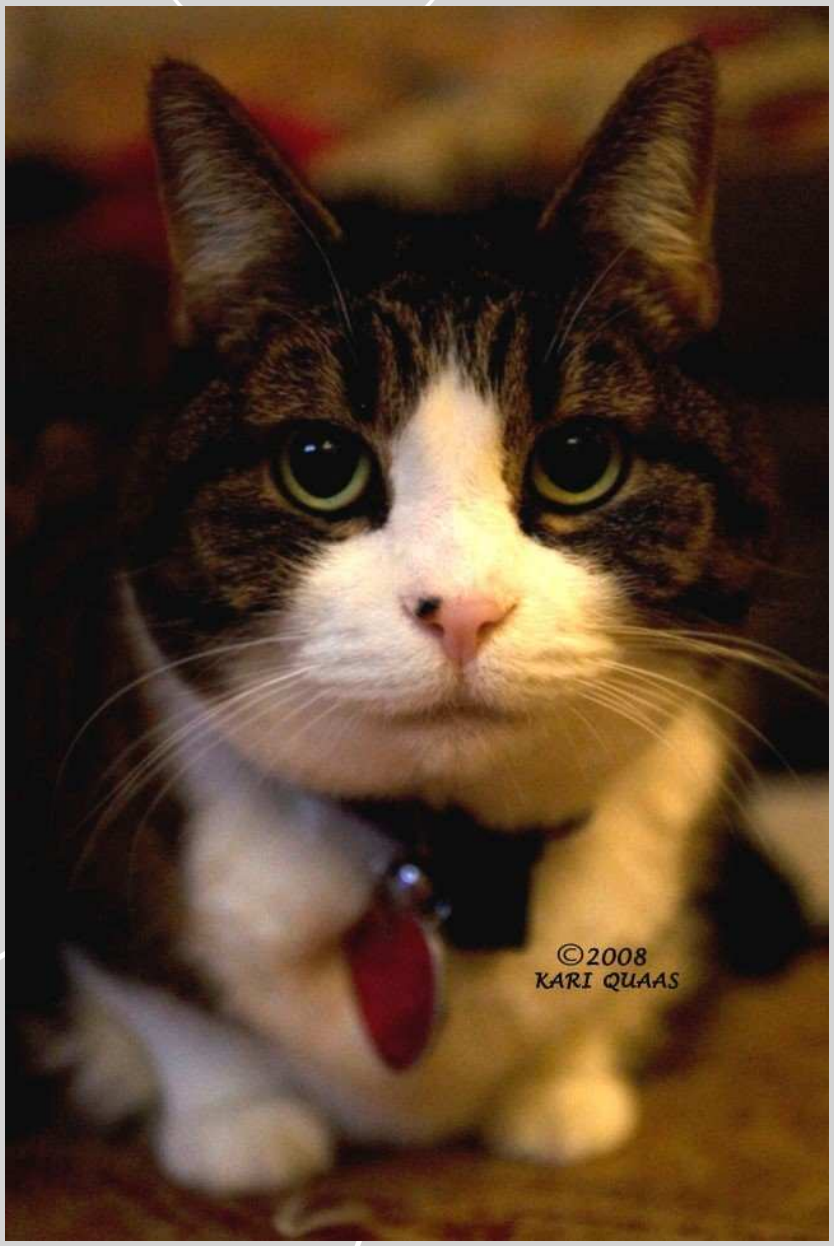
“Arise from sleep, old cat,
And with great yawns and stretchings…
Amble out for love.”
~ Kobayashi Issa, Japanese Haiku

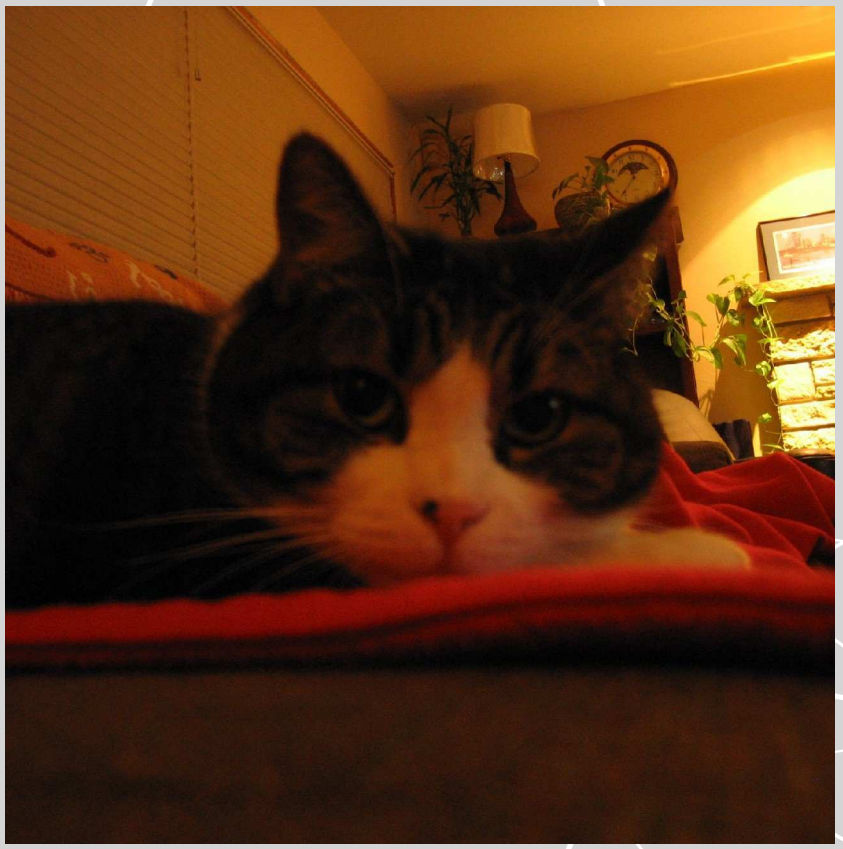


The squirrel was on loan from The Whitrights in 2004 when Rayna was in the hospital for such a long time. I don't remember why I had it exactly, but since we did, Speck was her curious self and wanted to make a new friend.

"Until one has loved an animal, a part of one's soul remains unawakened."

~Anatole France





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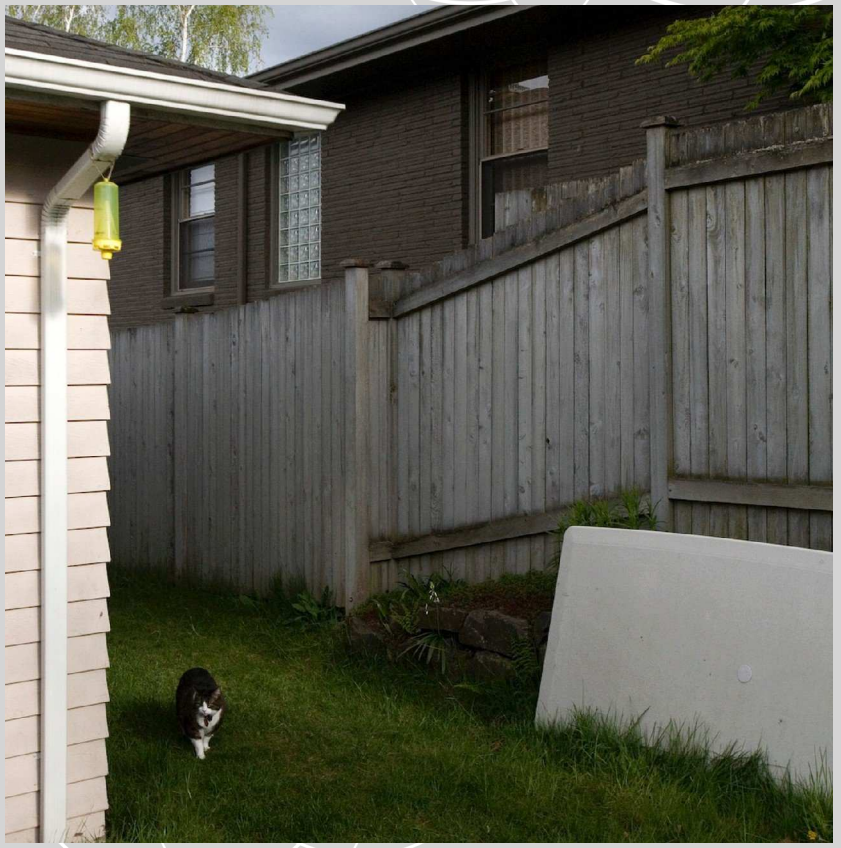
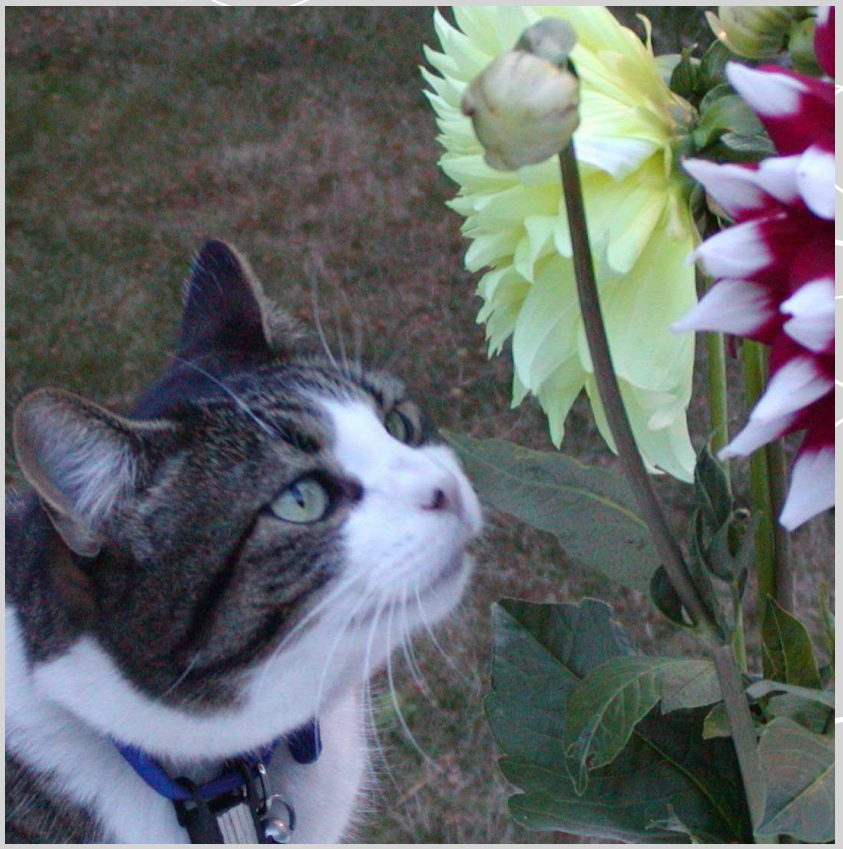
Speck =^.^=

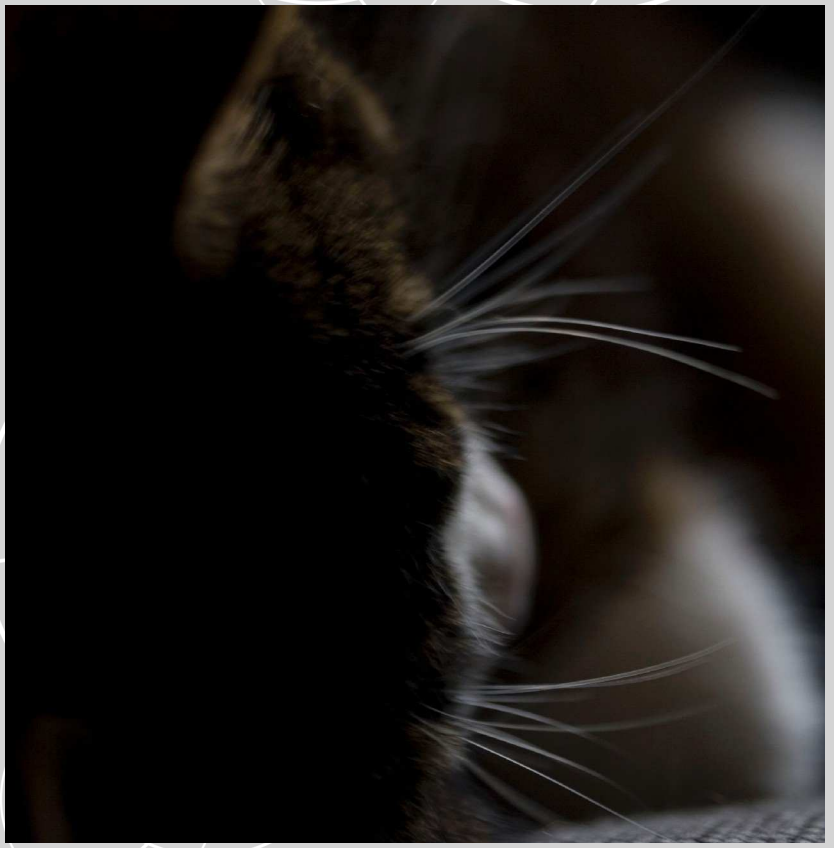
"A cat is a lion in a jungle of small bushes."

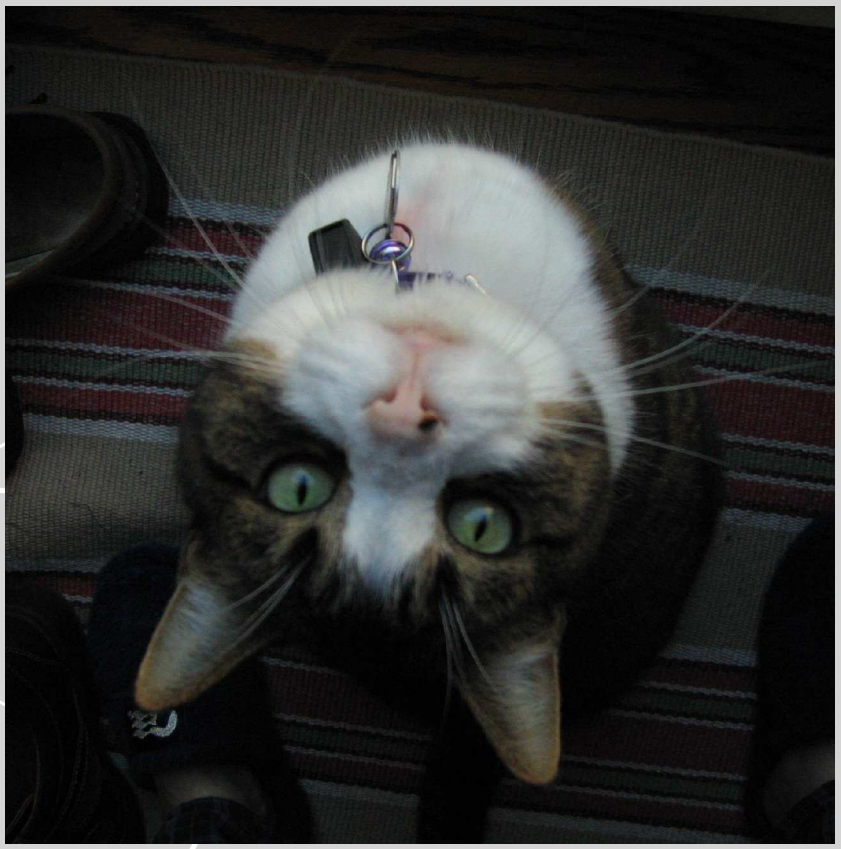
~ Indian Proverb

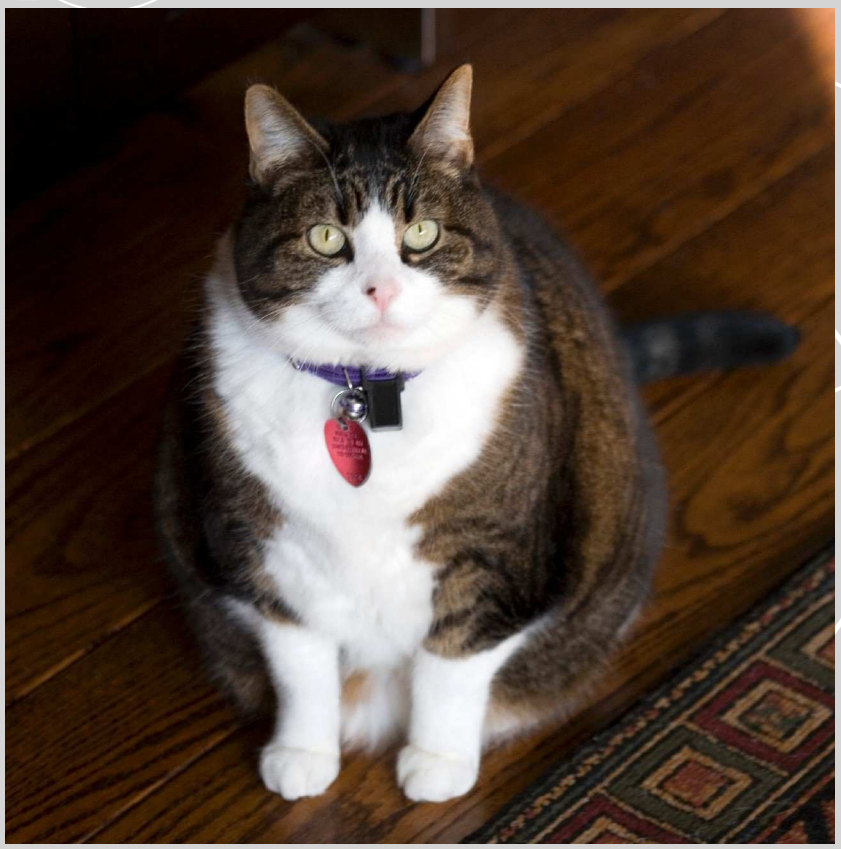
Speck =^.^=







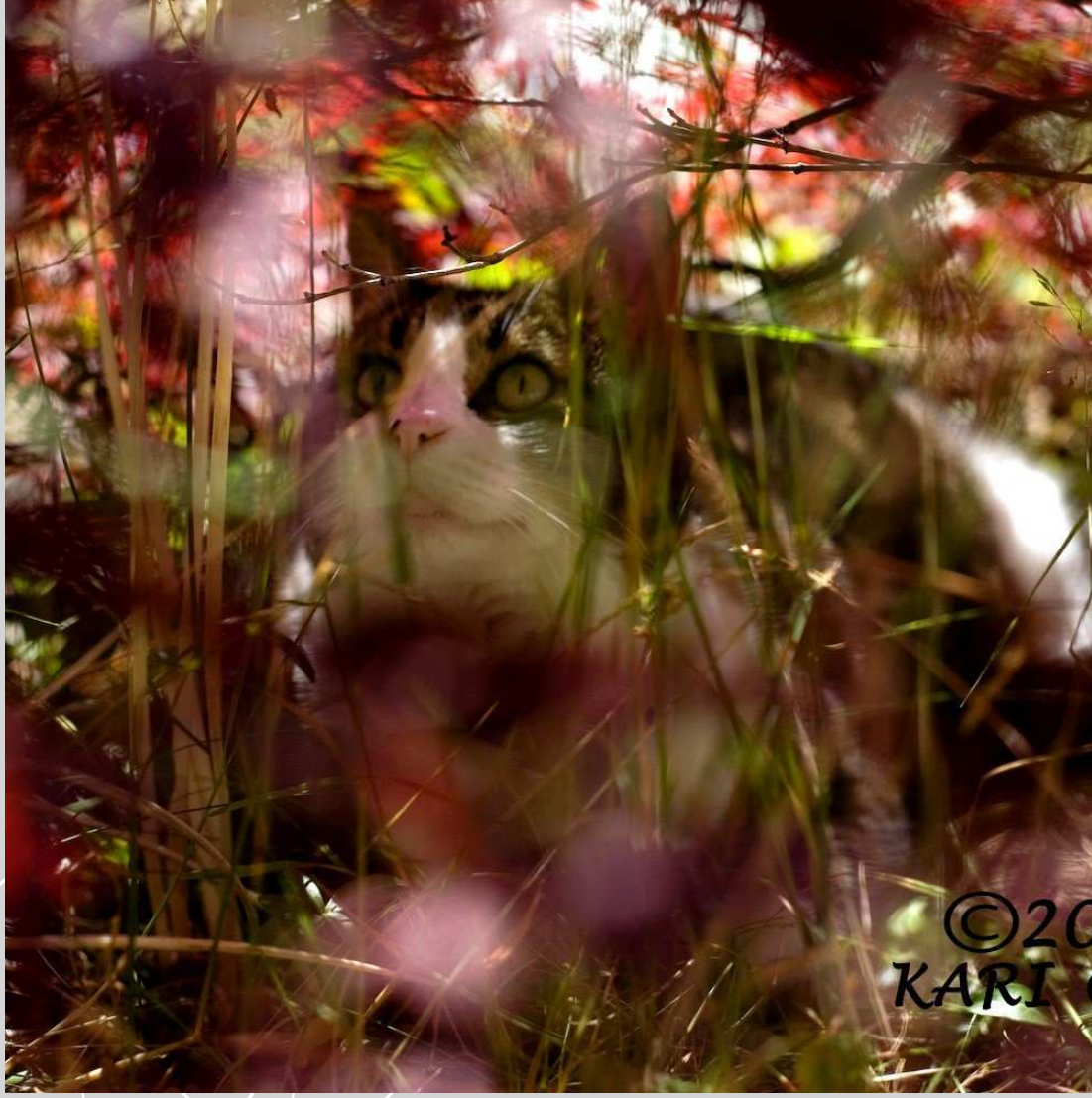




Speck =^.^=

Waiting for the Ding, Ding

“I've found that the way a person feels about cats-and the way they feel about him or her in return-is usually an excellent gauge by which to measure a person's character.” ~ P.C. Cast, Marked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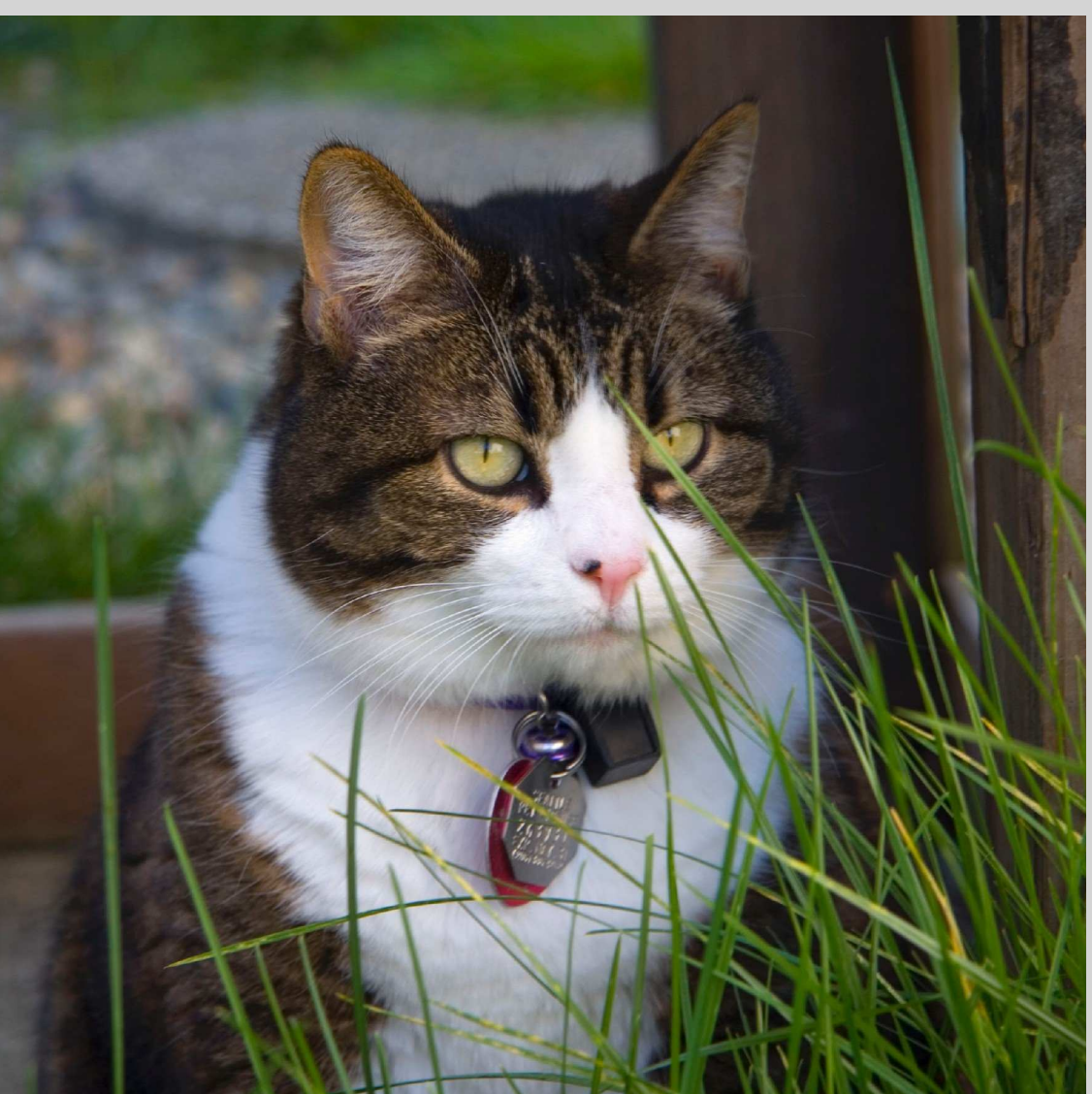

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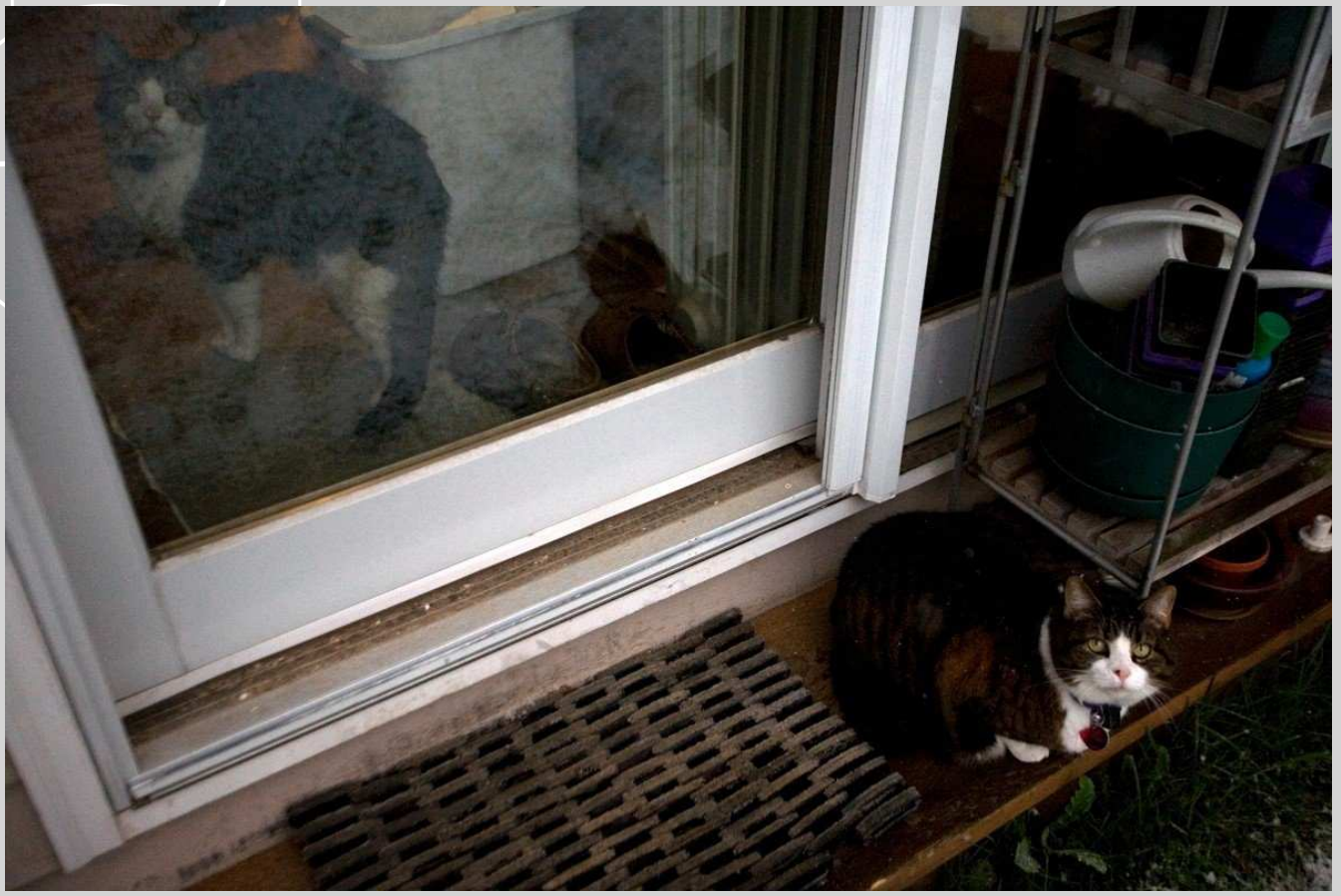
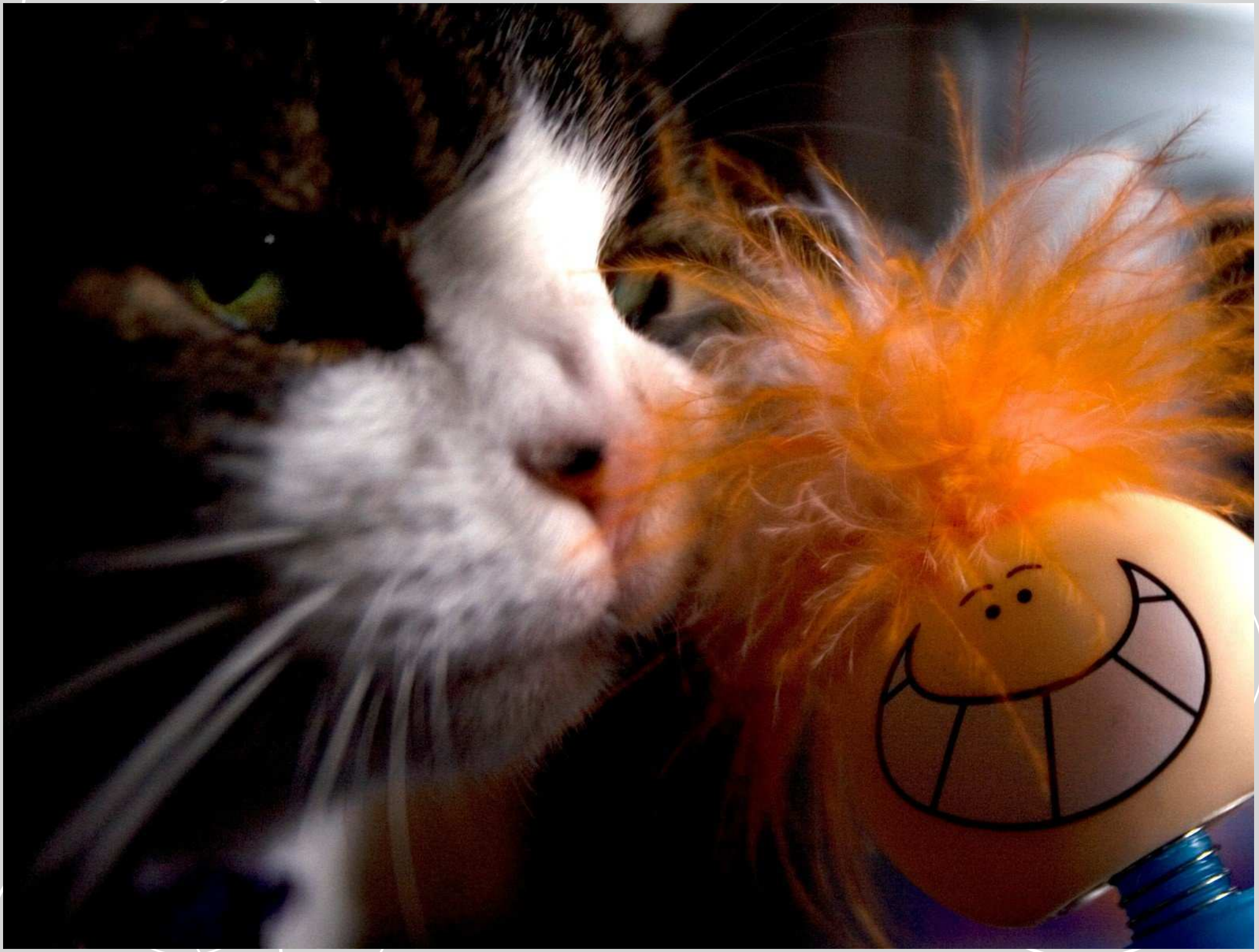
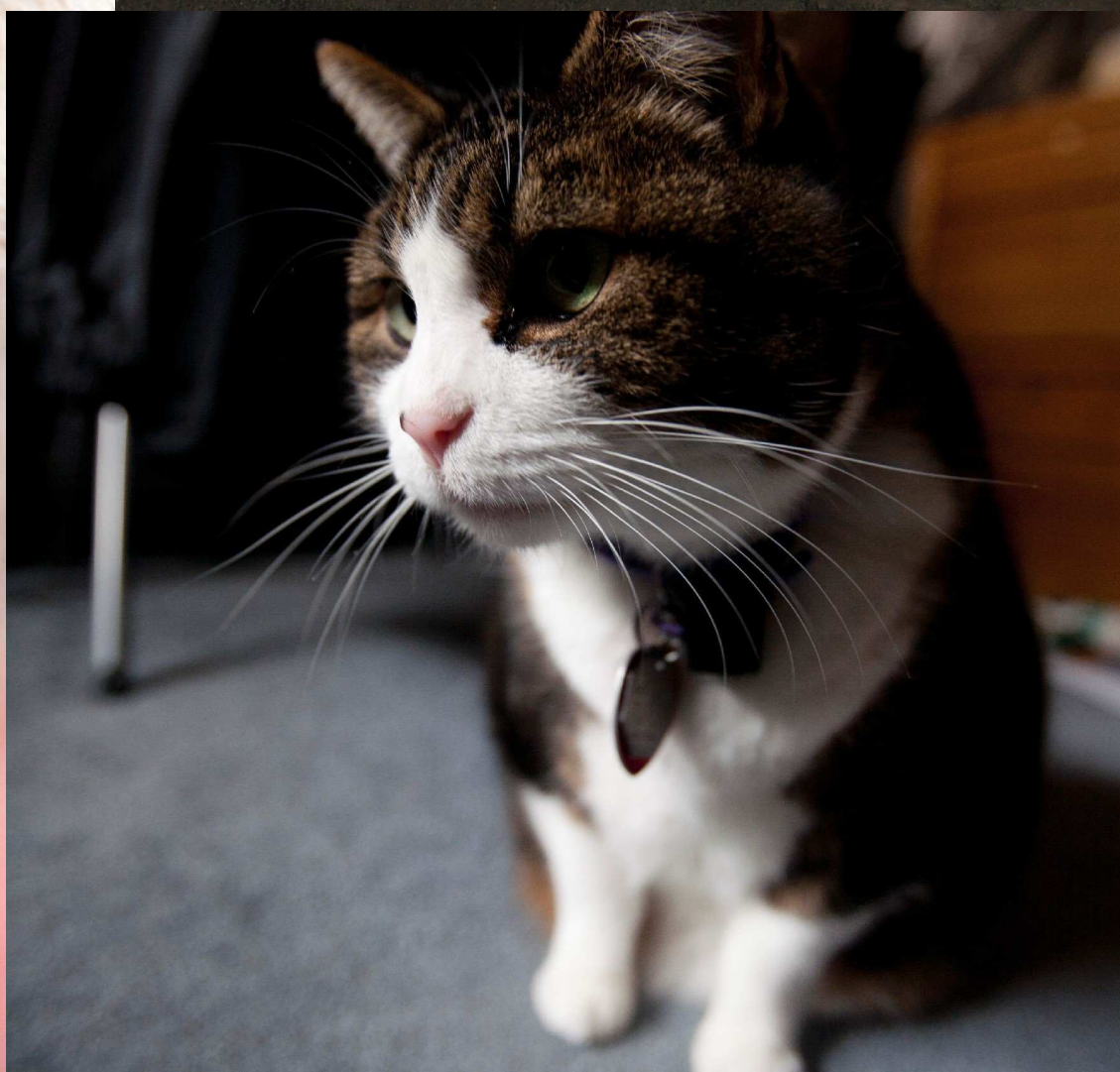


"When I look into the eyes of an animal I do not see an animal. I see a living being. I see a friend. I feel a soul. "

~ A.D. Williams



Once a triangle head, always
a triangle head.



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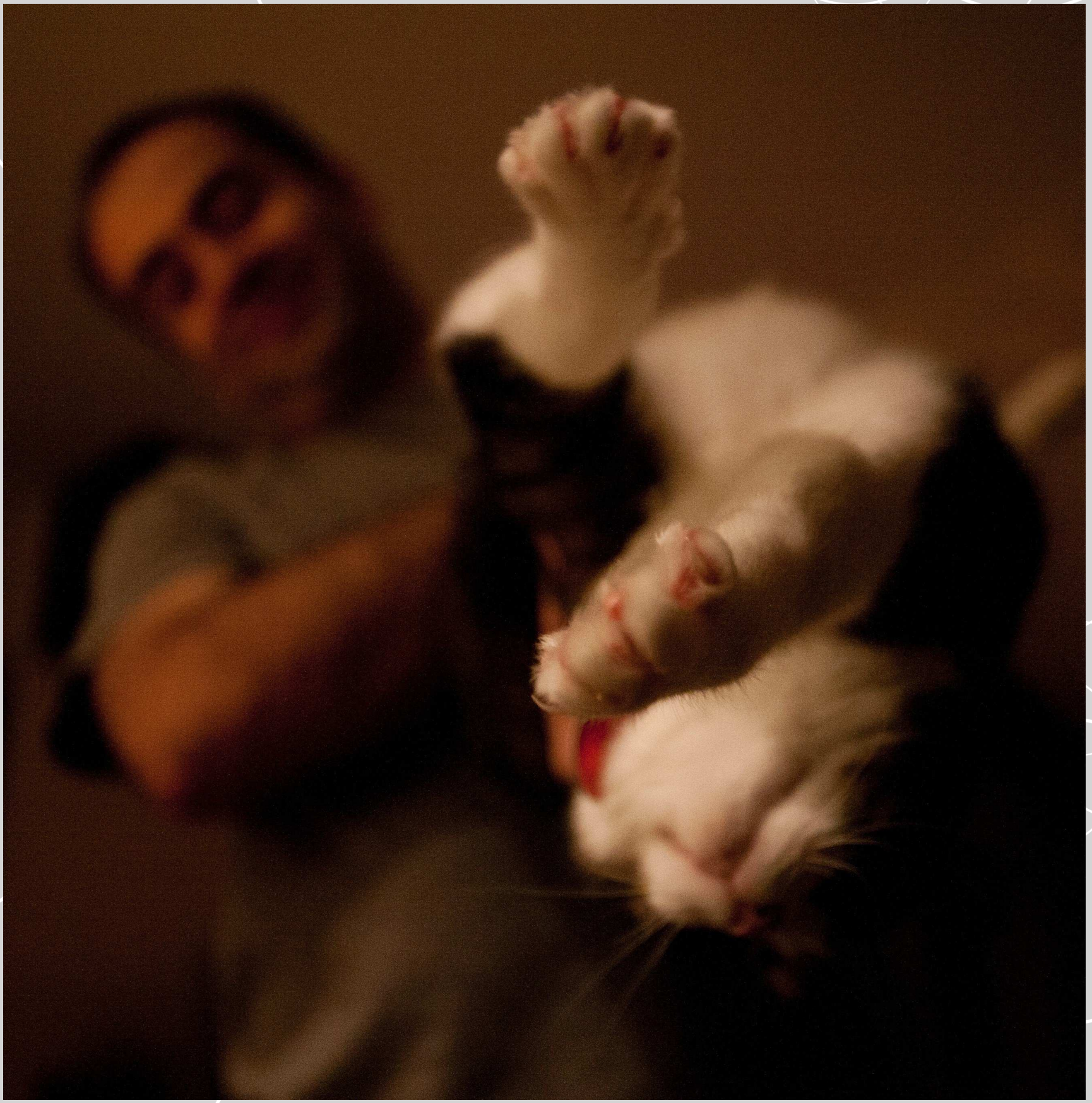
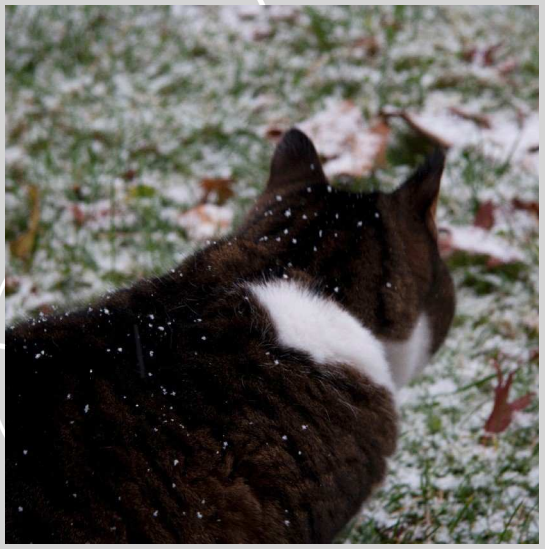
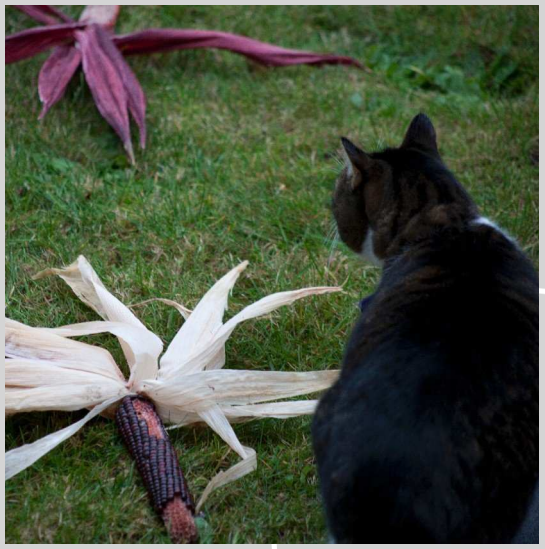
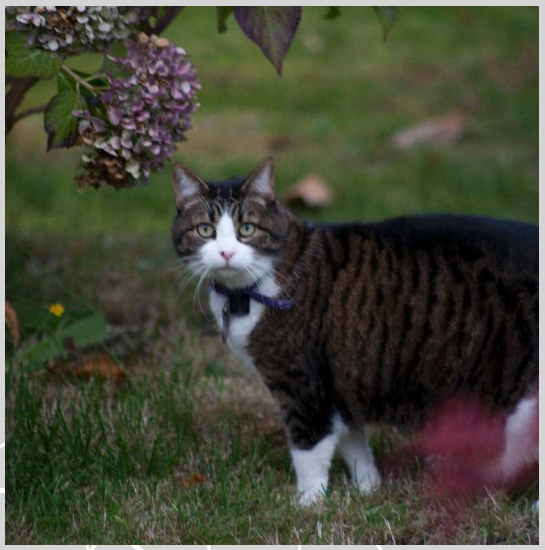






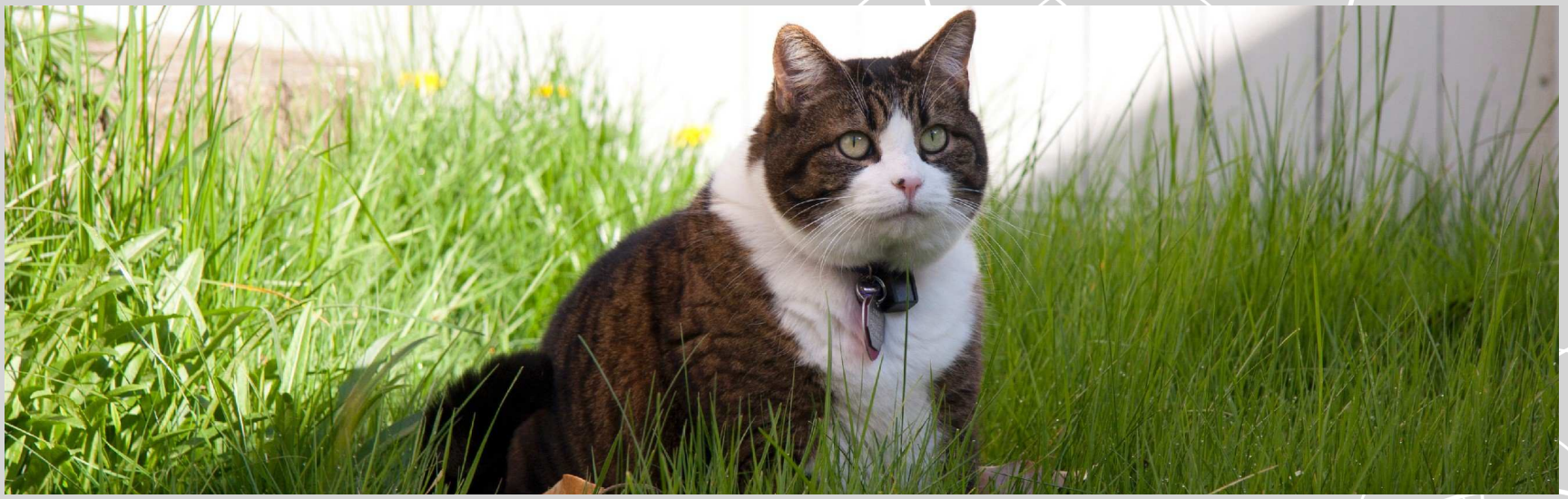


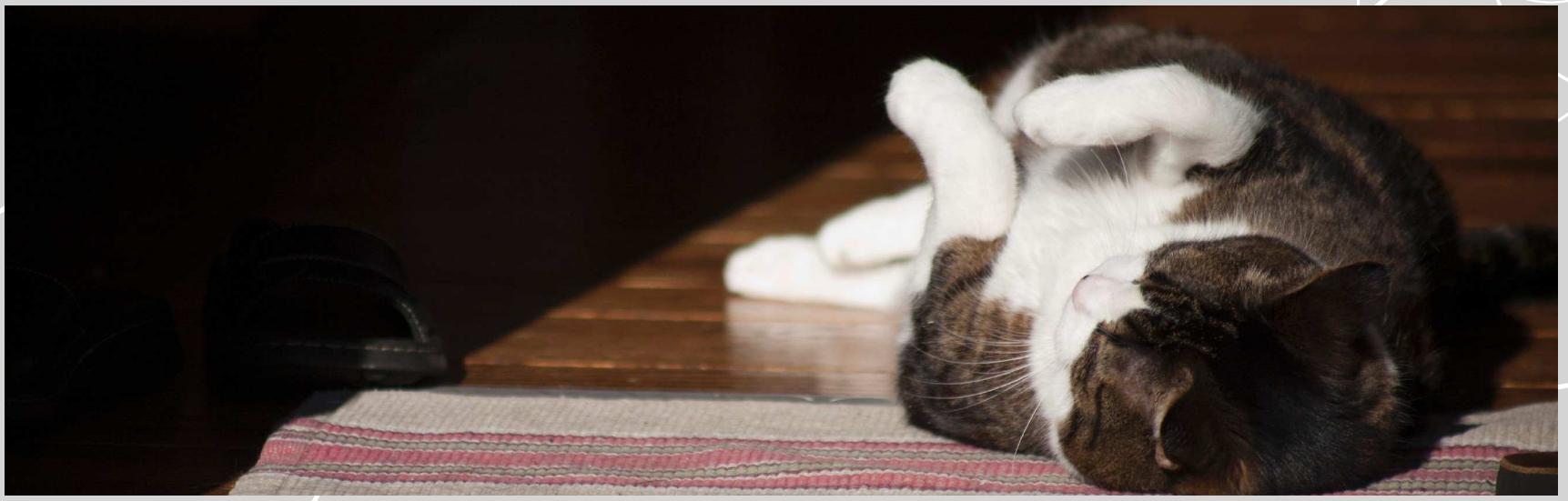
"Curiosity killed the cat but, satisfaction brought it back."

“Cats can work out mathematically the exact place to sit that will cause most inconvenience.”

~ Pam Brown

Speck =^.^=





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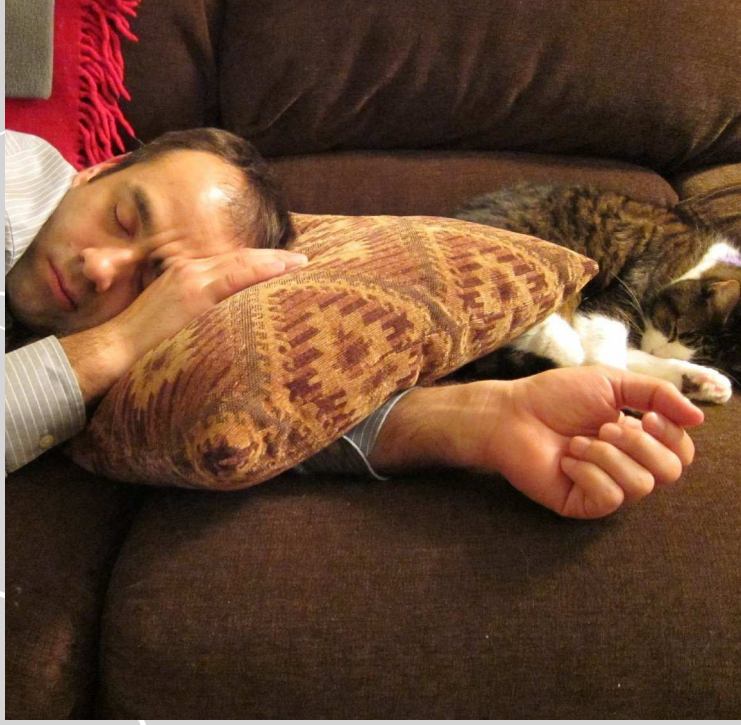
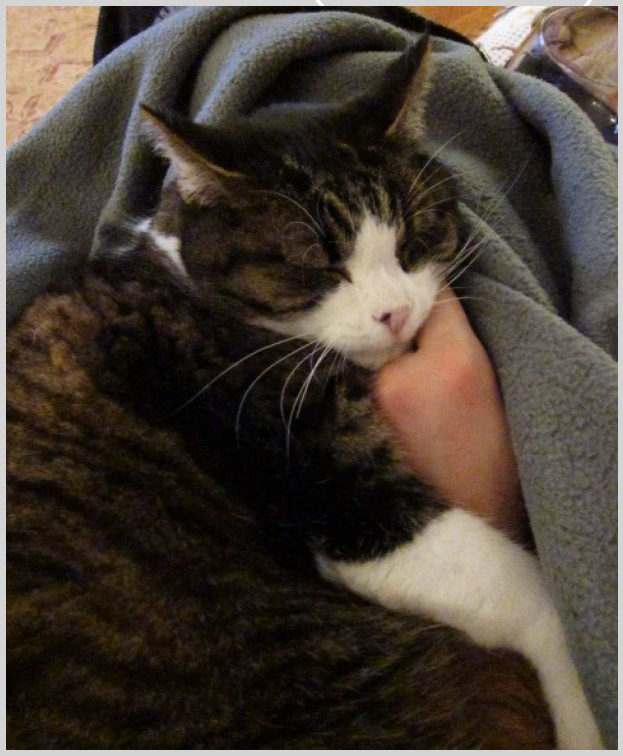
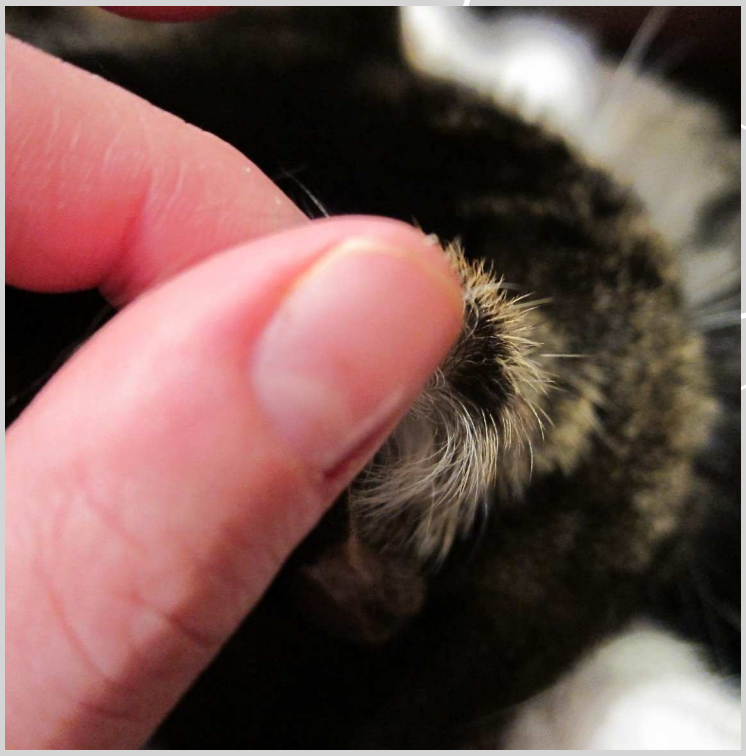
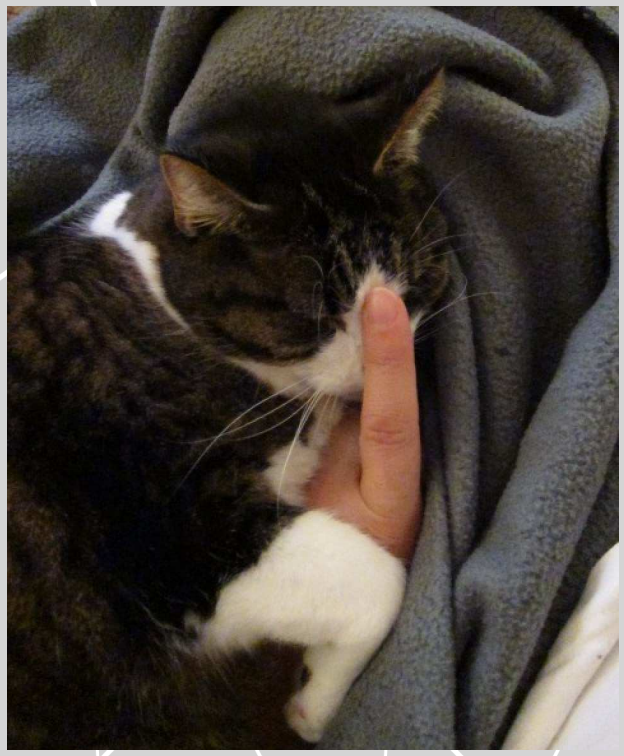
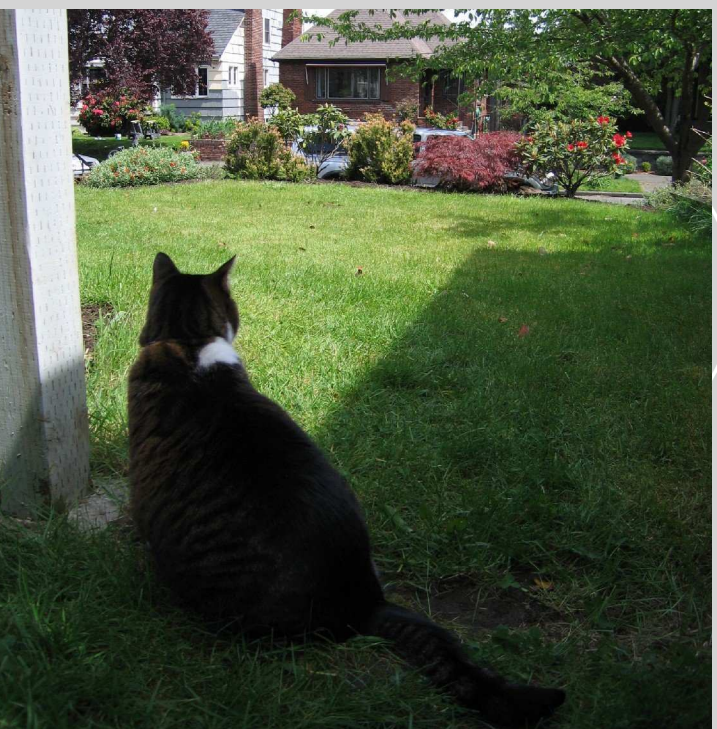
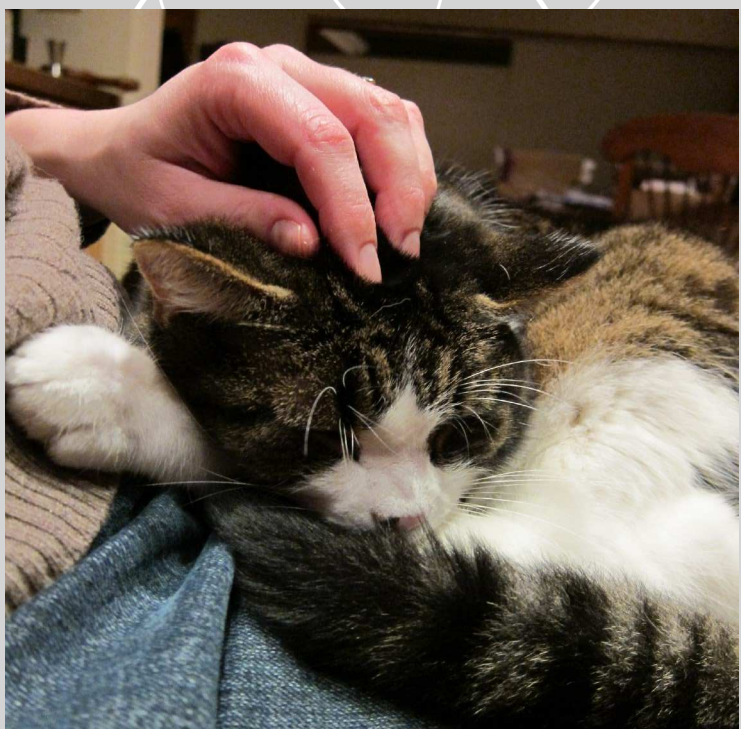
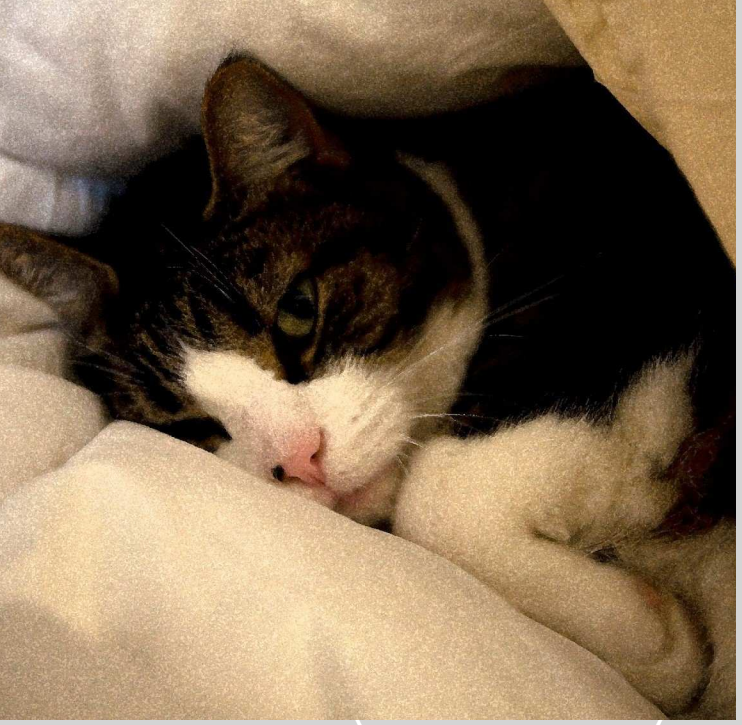
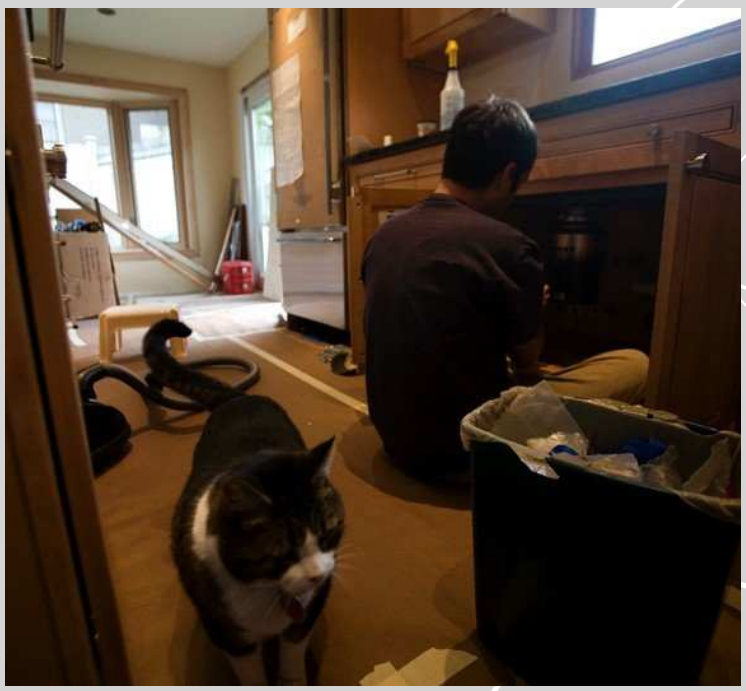
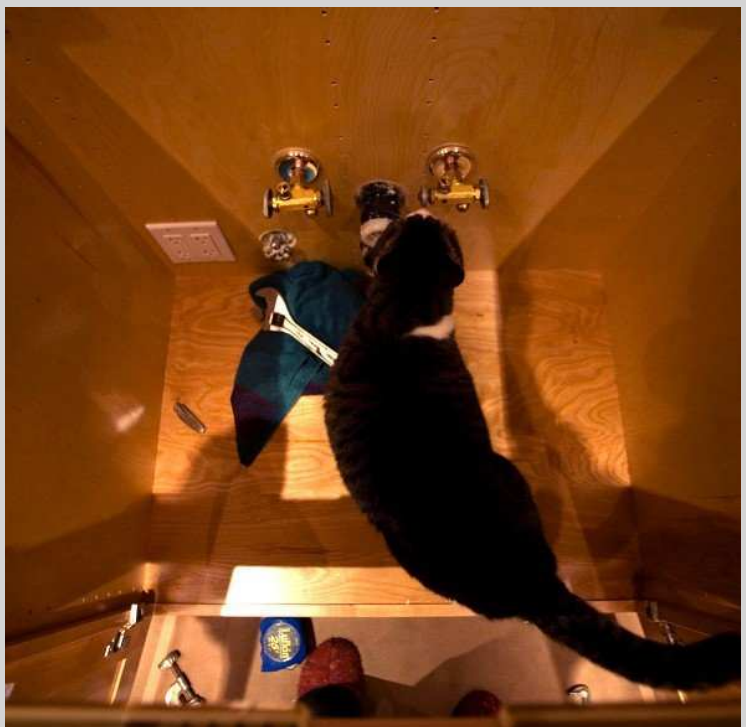








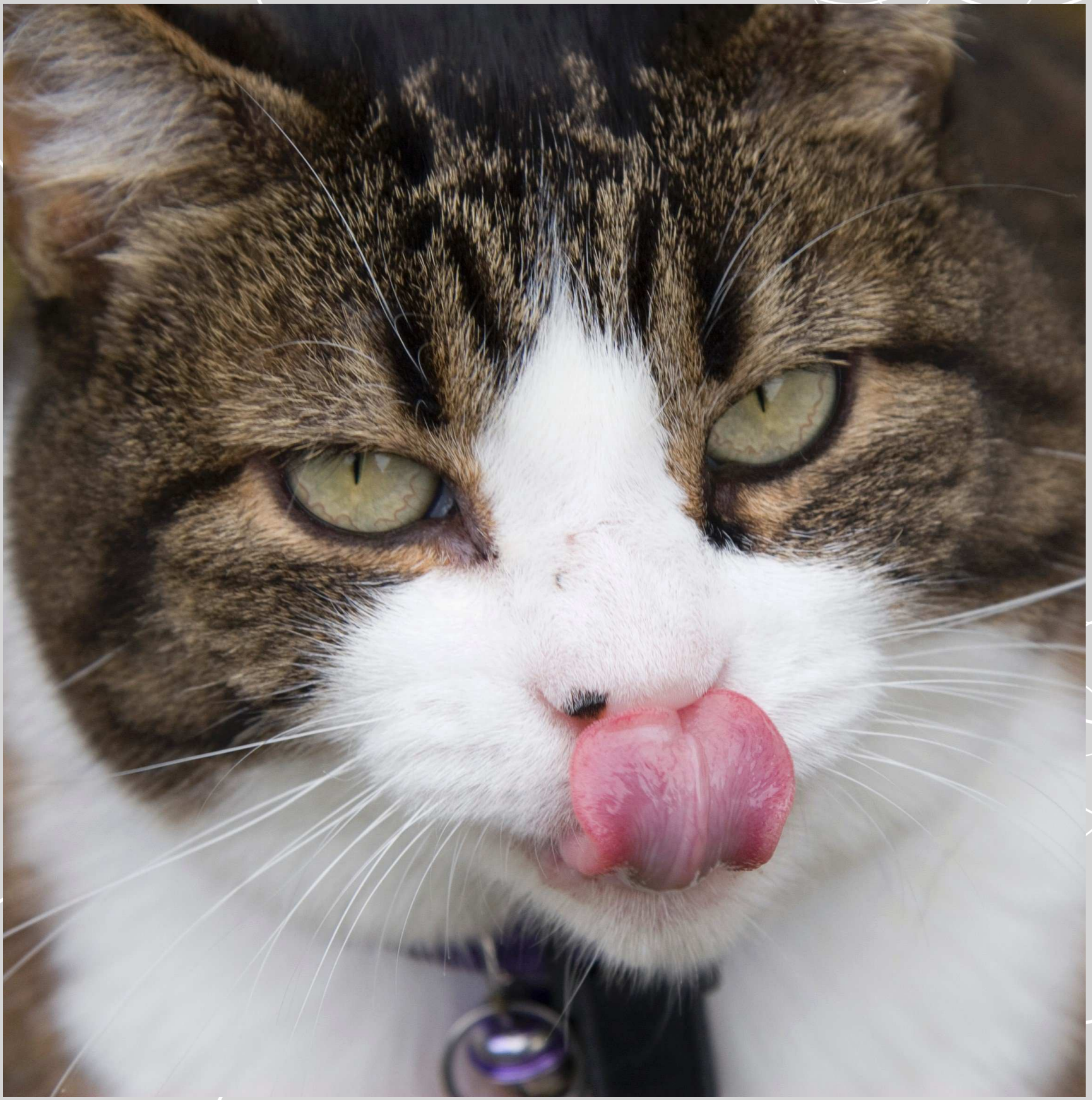


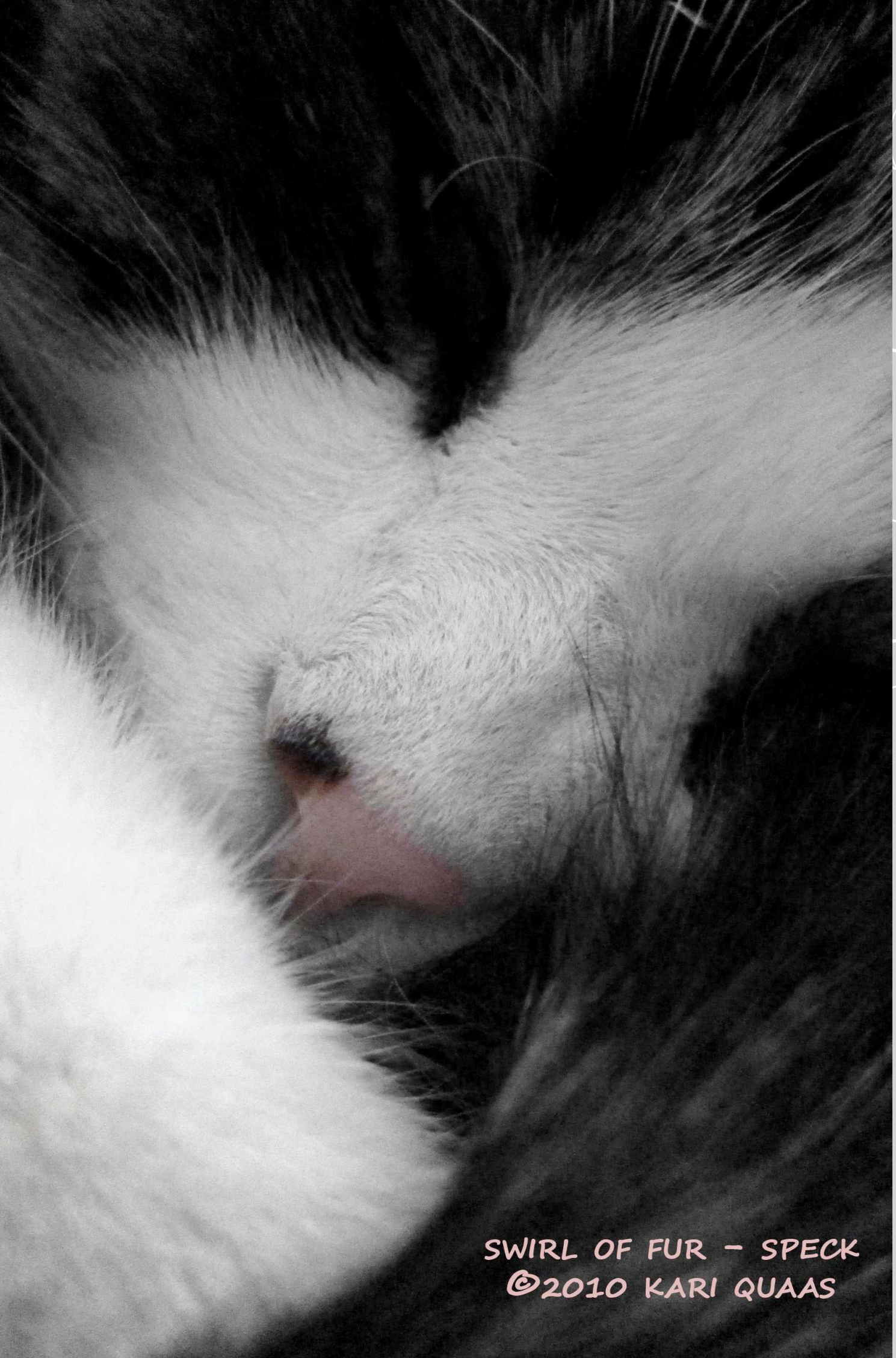


Voyager 4



Speck =^.^=





So photogenic and fun to photograph was the Speck. During and after my photography program at the University of Washington (2006-2007), I continued to make images of her and occasionally entered them into shows and contests. This image called "Swirl of Fur" was in the Cutest Pet Contest with the Everett Herald in 2010. I didn't win the contest, but she sure did deserve the nomination.

Speck epitomized cozy and adaptability. Having endured a near complete home remodel, she stayed curious and interested in her people. When we got to chill out at the end of a busy day, that was a great time for her.

Stillness.

Faithfulness.

Love.

09
QUAAS

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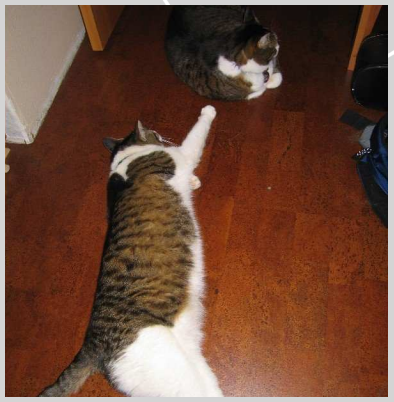
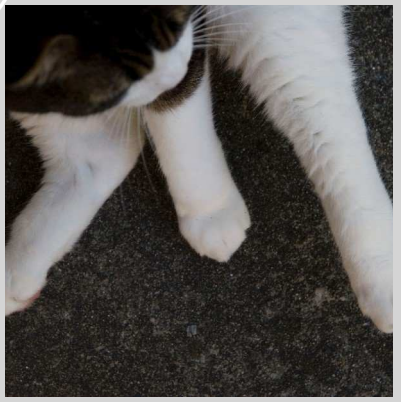
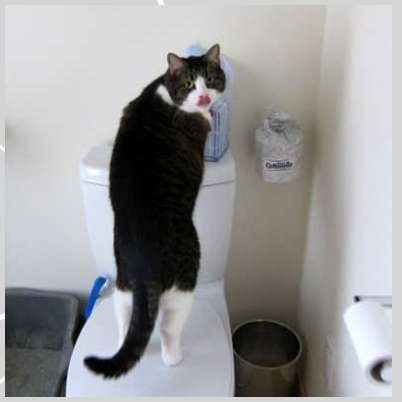
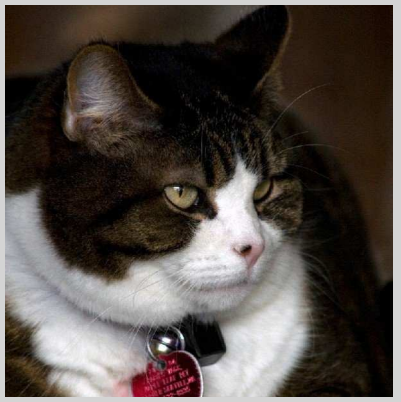
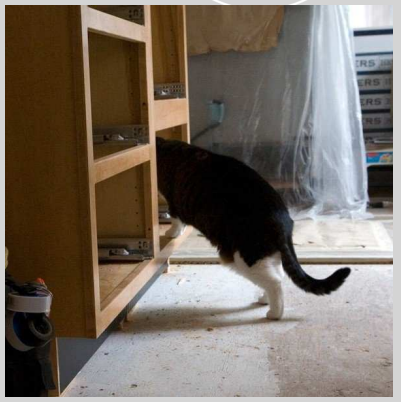
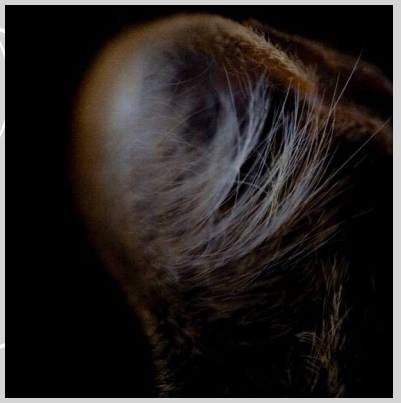
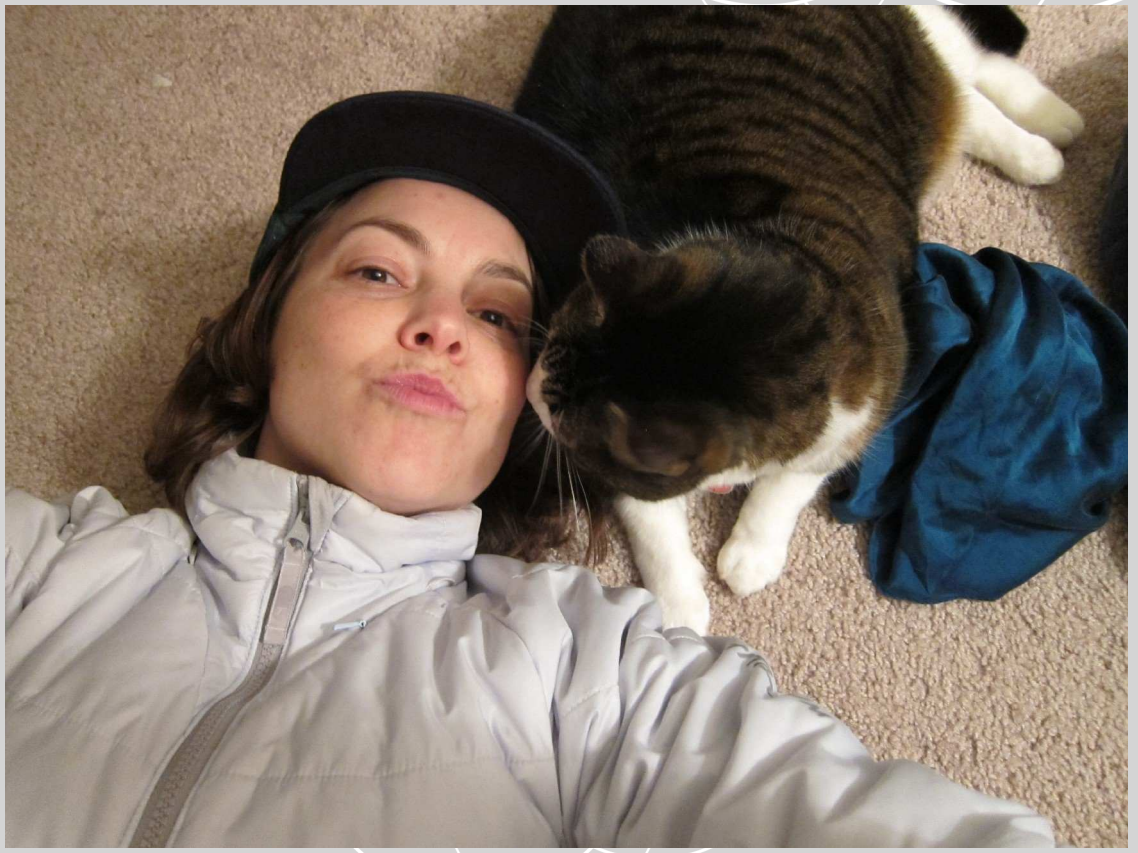





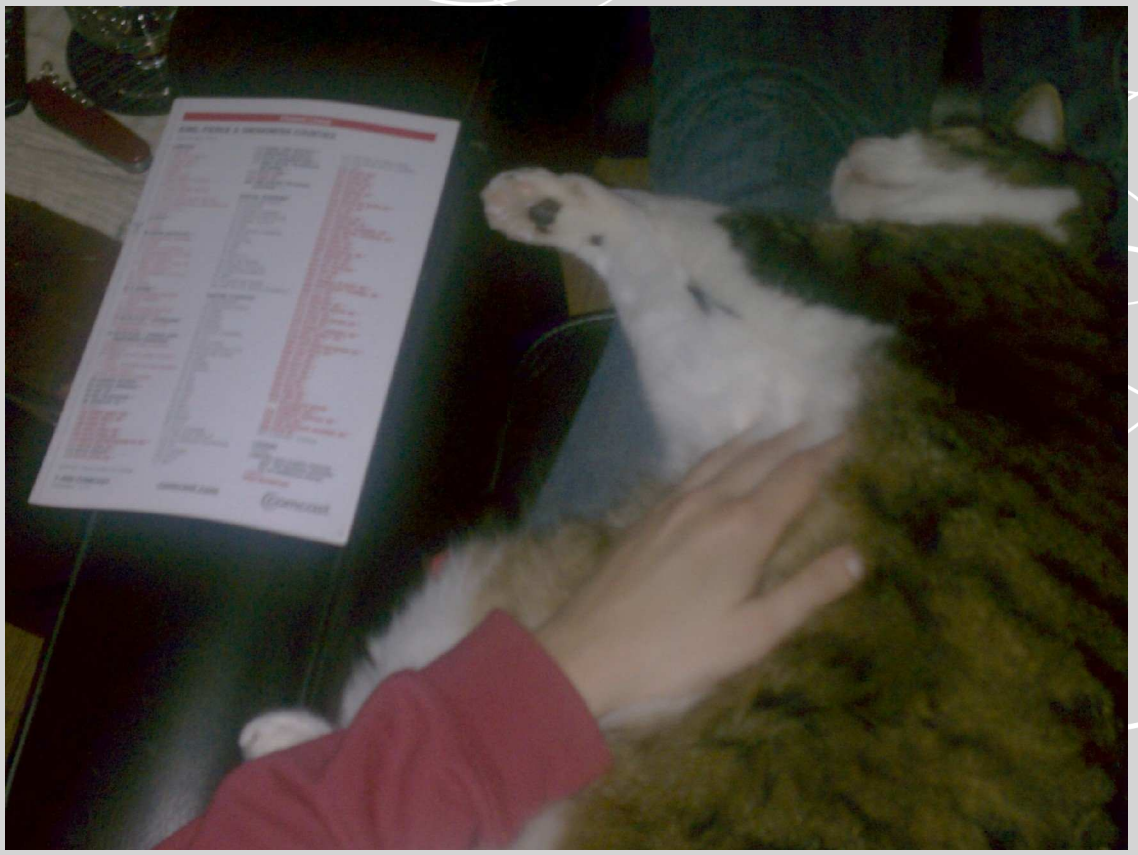





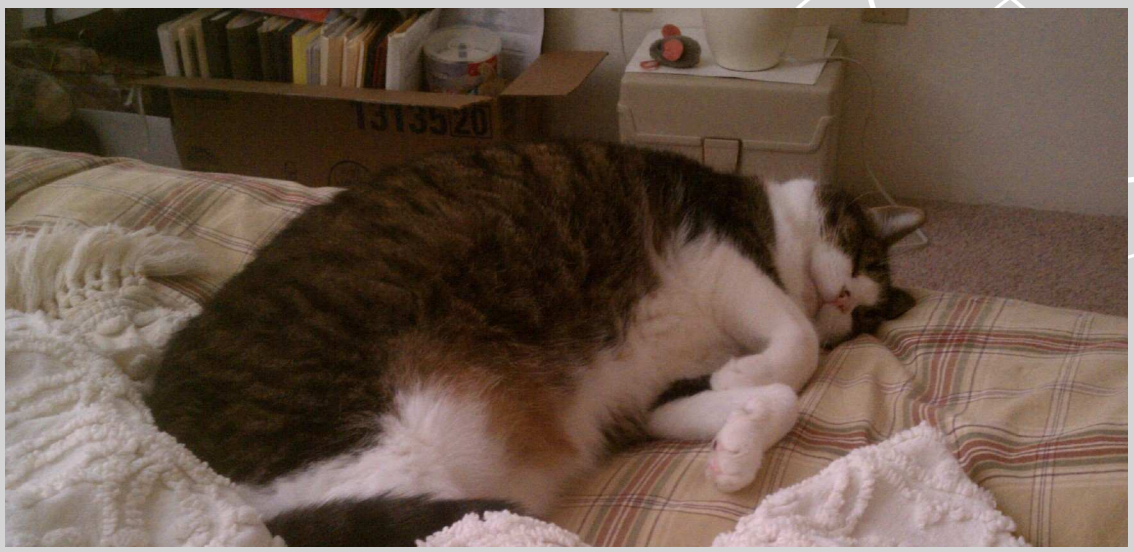
Shoreline, Washington 2010-2011



This was a year of many changes. Nate and I separated after nearly 12 years of marriage in September of 2010, and our divorce was final in February 2011. On 10/10/10, I moved out of our Seattle home and found a two bedroom apartment in Shoreline at Ballinger Commons. It was an okay place, but the warmest part was my sweet kitten. She truly ended up being such a delightful companion and life saver during this time.



I dearly missed my Buddy, but Speck was flexible and easier to switch to an indoor cat. The division worked ok.



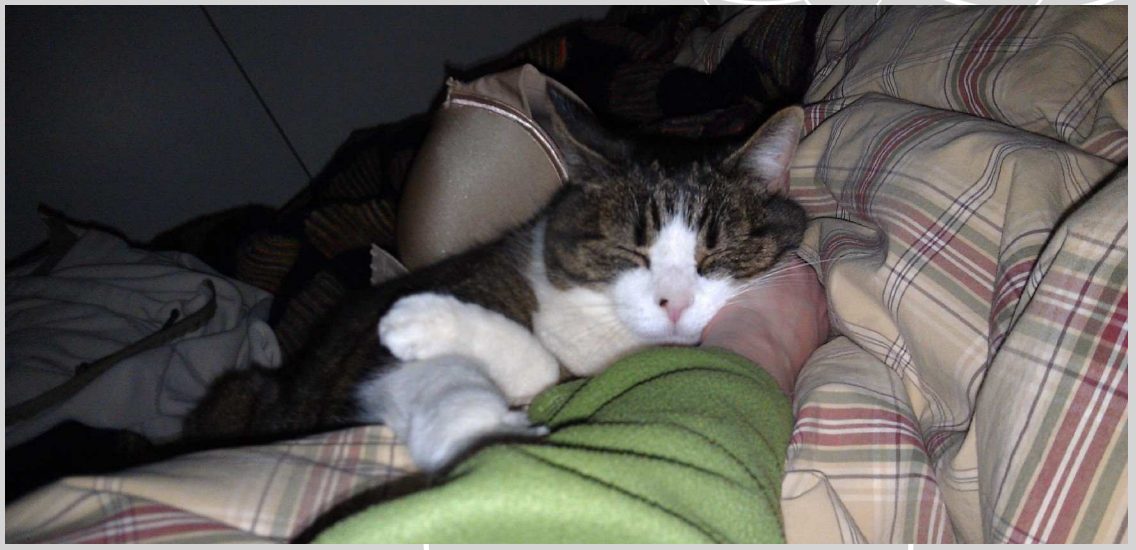
Earlier in the same year, I had begun traveling north regularly to Bellingham to assist my cousin George Bismore, when we learned that he had ALS or Lou Gehrig's Disease. There had been signs since 2009, but the official diagnosis came in March 2010.

I chose the apartment in Shoreline to be closer to George and still be close to Seattle to finish off my divorce. George's ALS progression was slow at first, but then at Halloween, he took a severe turn for the worse. We (Jen Warwick, my new, and George's dear friend) needed caregiving help overnight. This is how I met my future husband, Oliver Ross.

We were friends first, but it grew into love.

"A meow massages the heart."

~ Stuart McMillan

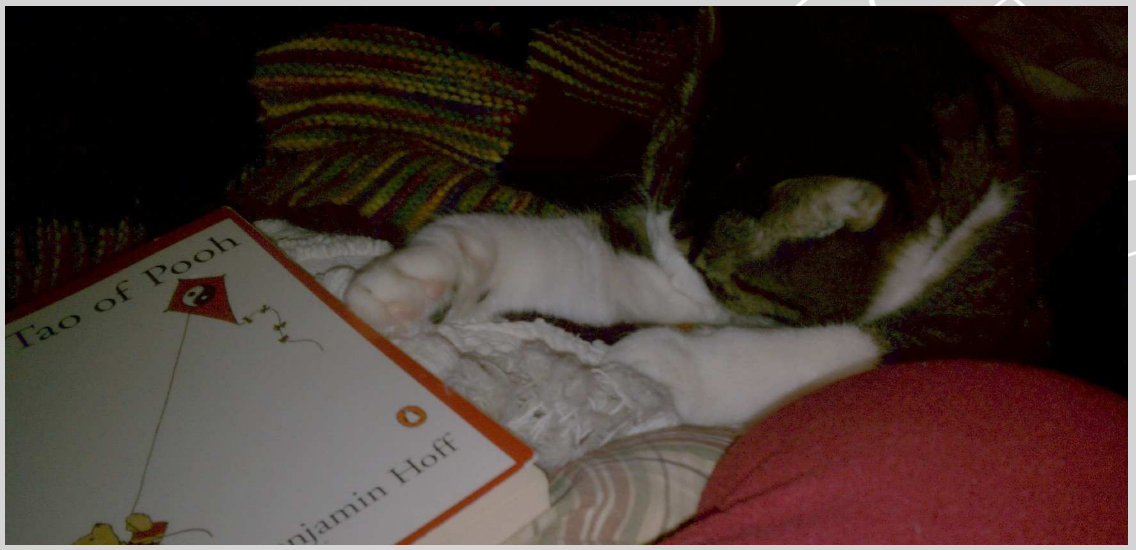


"Meow" means "woof" in cat."

~ George Carlin

“If animals could speak, the dog would be a blundering outspoken fellow; but the cat would have the rare grace of never saying a word too much.”

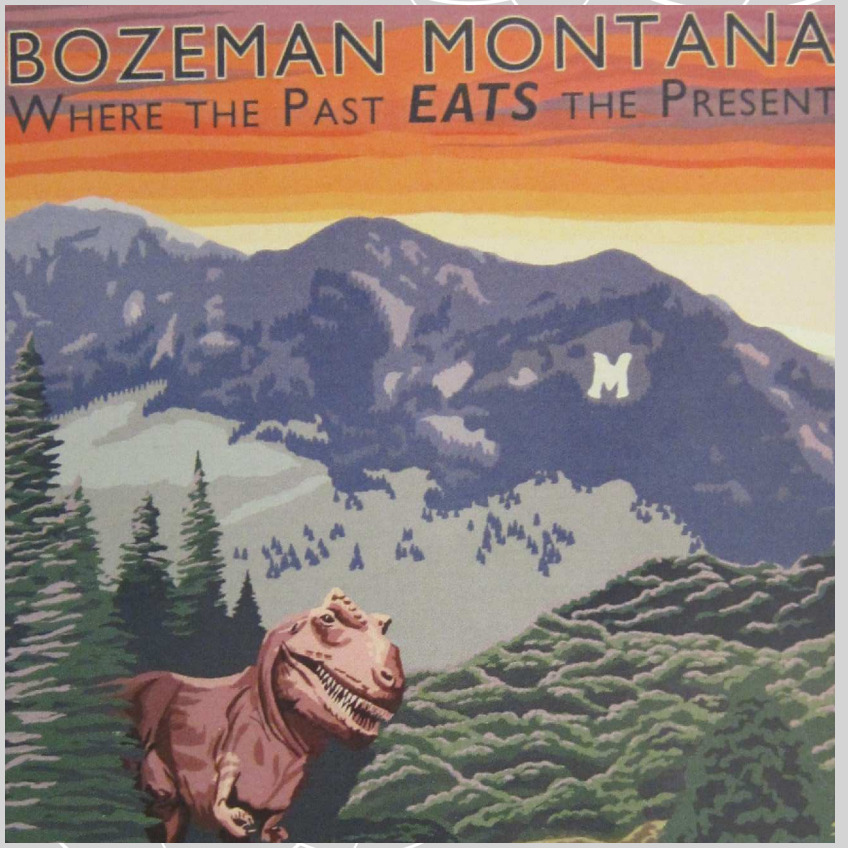
~ Mark Twain



"As anyone who has ever been around a cat for any length of time well knows cats have enormous patience with the limitations of the human kind."

~ Cleveland Amory

Bozeman, Montana
2011



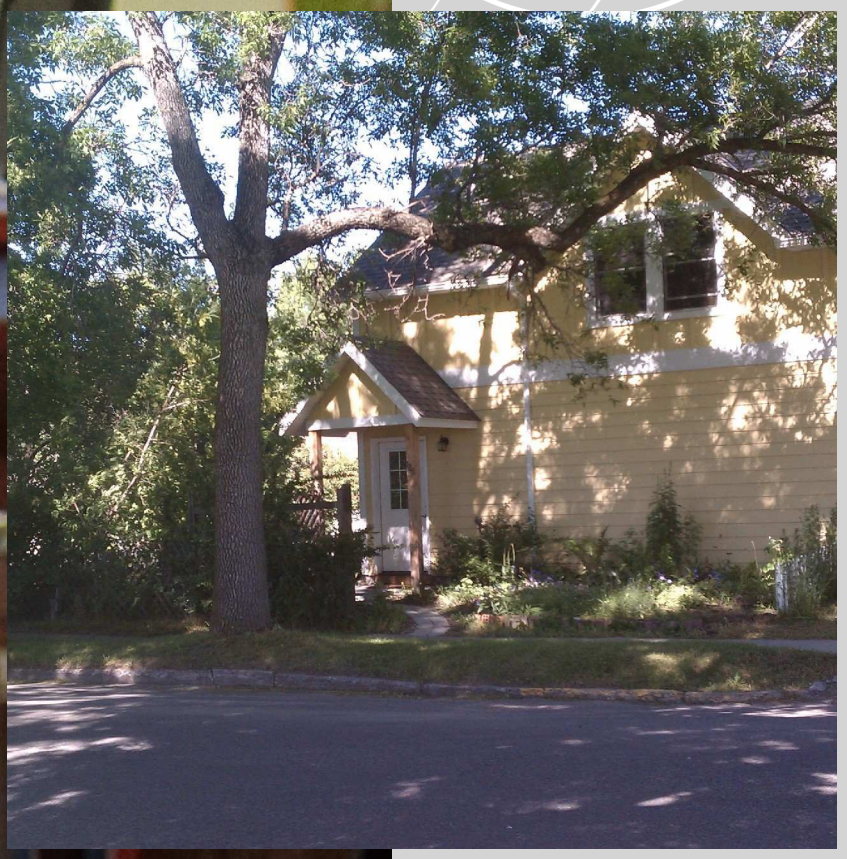
While waiting for my divorce to be final, I decided I wanted to go somewhere for an extended visit to a place that I chose all on my own. I chose Bozeman for the month of July, which is relatively close to the small town of Gardiner where Cool Works, my employer, is based. Bozeman, in contrast, is a big city with lots of amenities and events like Bellingham including the Art Walk, Tuesday night Farmers Markets, a Zombie Walk, and Music on Main on Thursdays. The town is also loaded with bike trails and a fair. What more could you ask for?

It was the "Summer of Kari" and I loved being there in the Garajmahal with my Speckie, the first cat to stay at the Bozeman garage apartment. Marjorie Smith, our host, called her a purr-fect guest. Speck enjoyed watching the world from the stairs, seeing Guy Noir, the neighbor cat in the yard, and venturing into the garden. I just relished in the fact that it felt like home.

While here, I spent one week in Puerto Rico with Oliver and his parents, Tom and Linda, for a family wedding. My Cool Works partners stepped up to cat-sit while I was away. ;-)

Speck and I also had visits at the Garajmahal from Brittany Byrtus and Megan Wicklin. She was a lovely hostess.

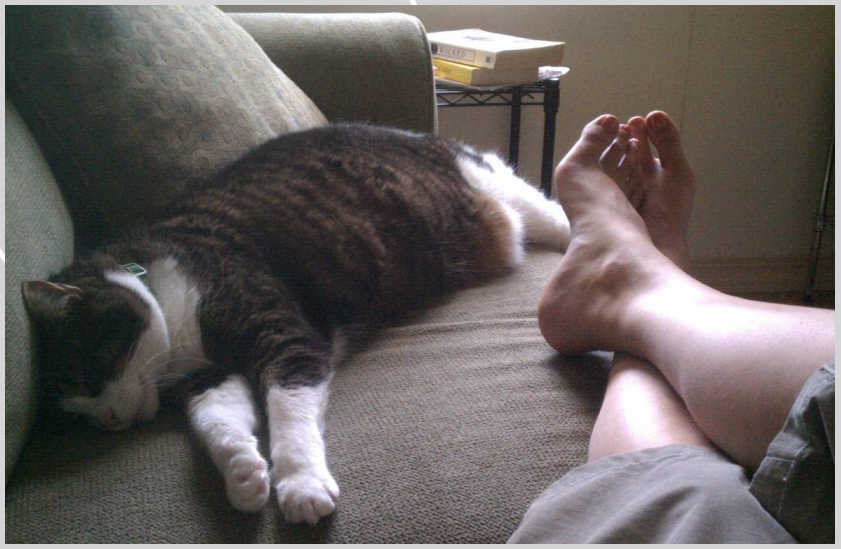
We left Bozeman while the Sweet Pea Festival was happening - a nice reminder of Speck's nickname.

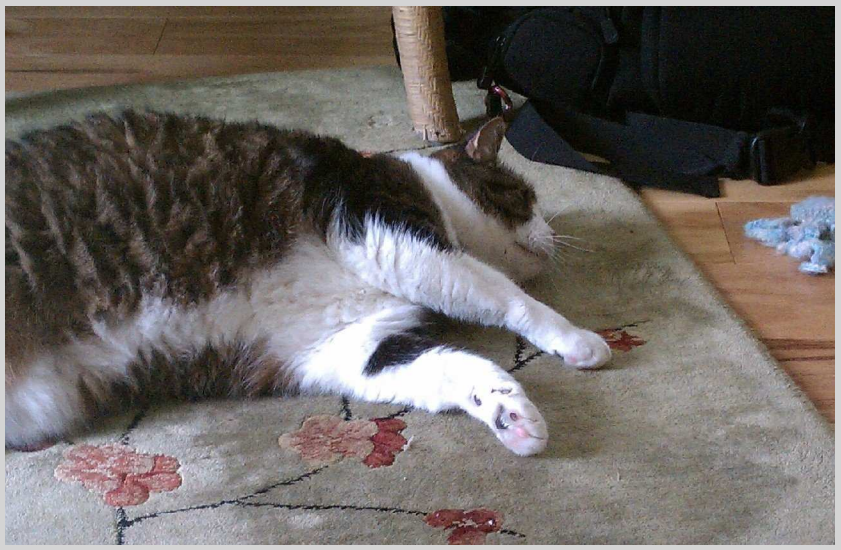


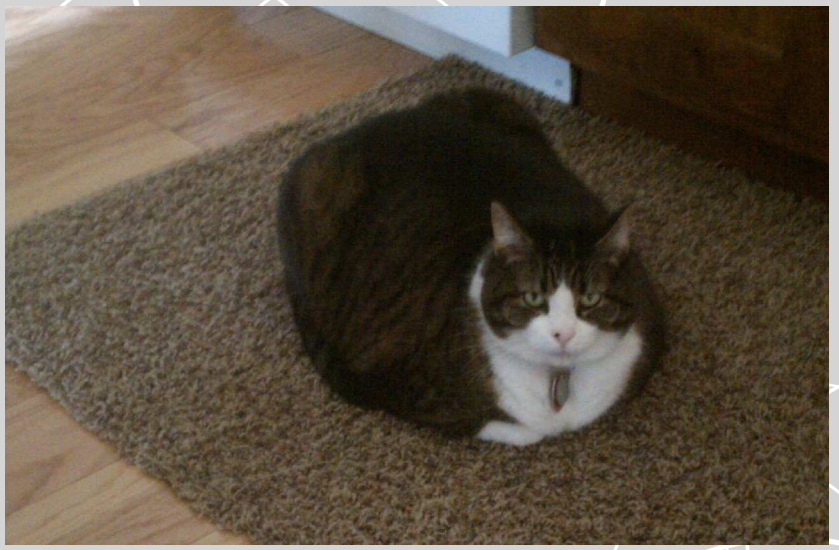
"People who love cats have some of the biggest hearts around."

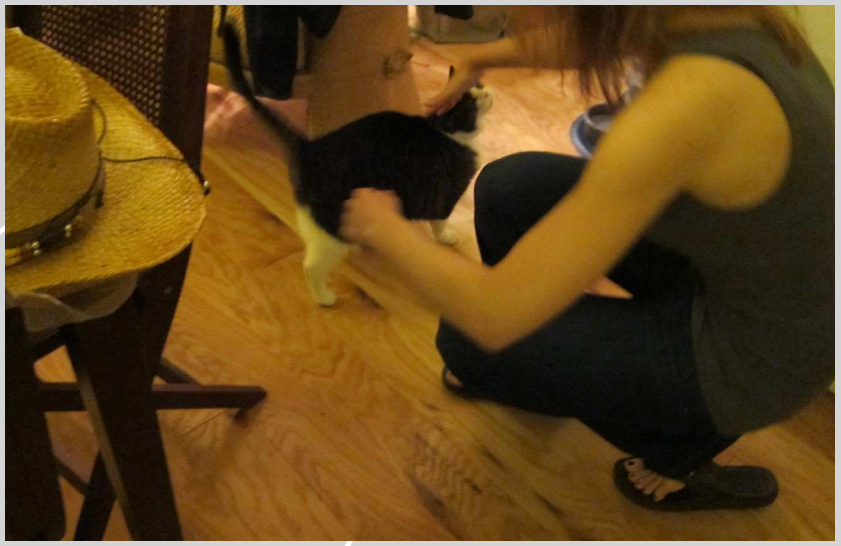
~Susan Easterly

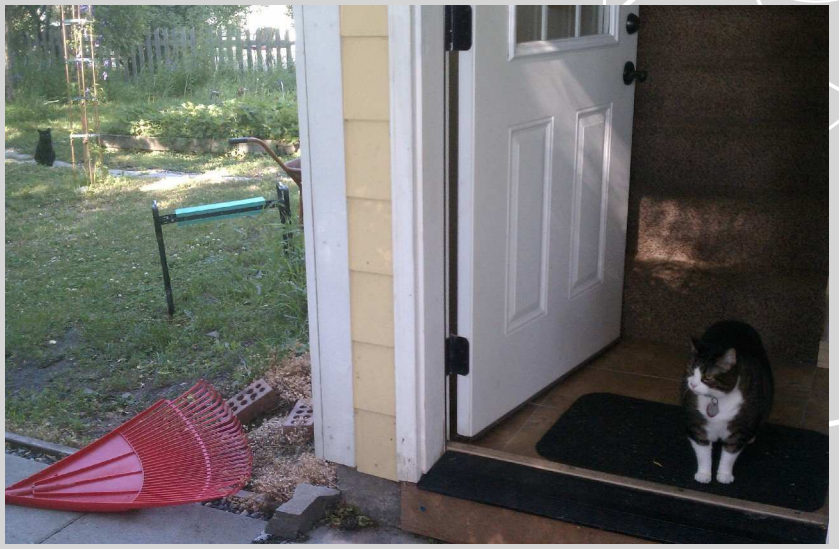
Speck =^.^=

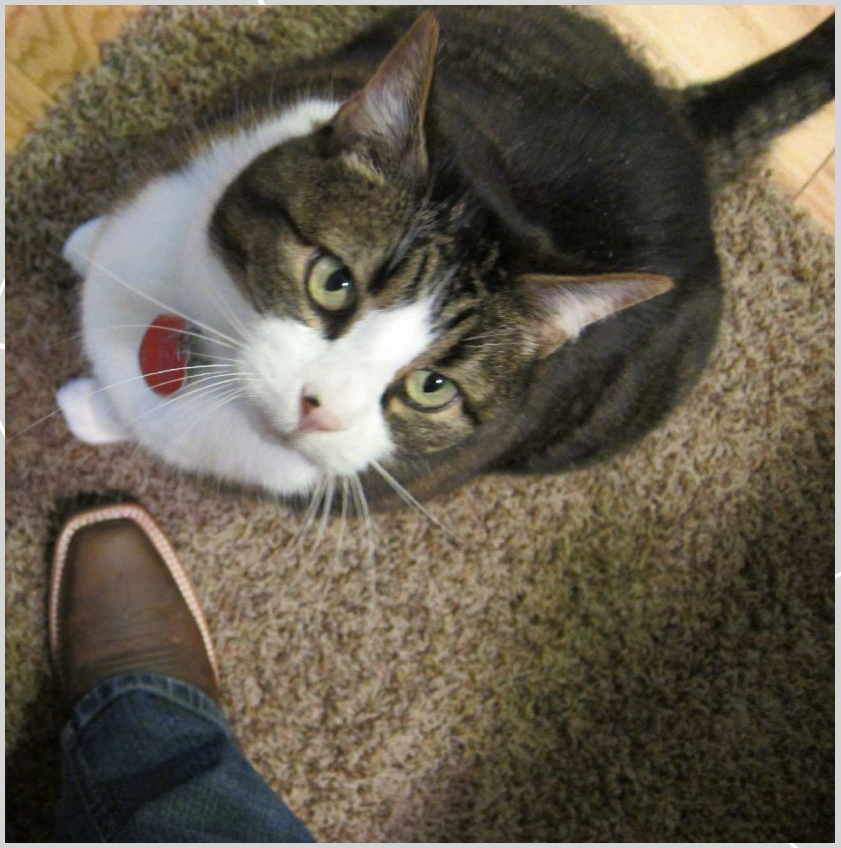












SPECK EYE - BOZEMAN, MONTANA
©2011 KARI LUCAS

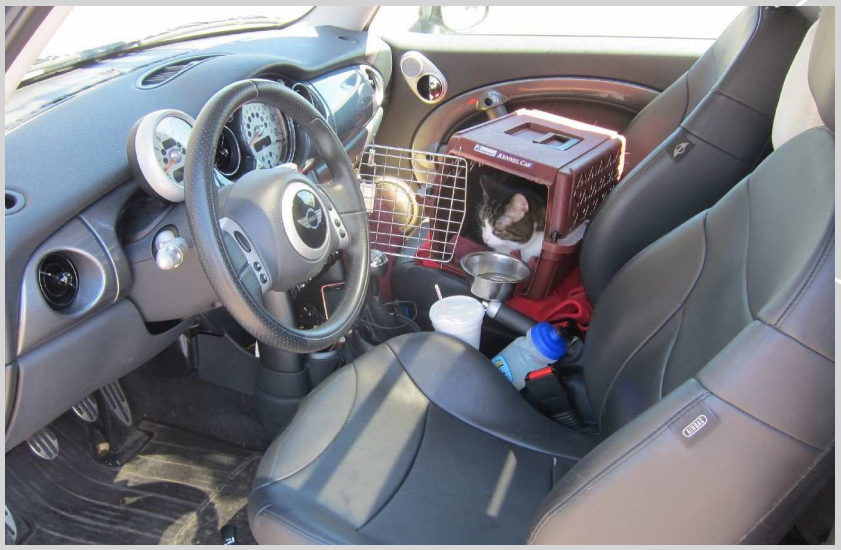
Road Trip from Bozeman to Bellingham - August 6, 2011

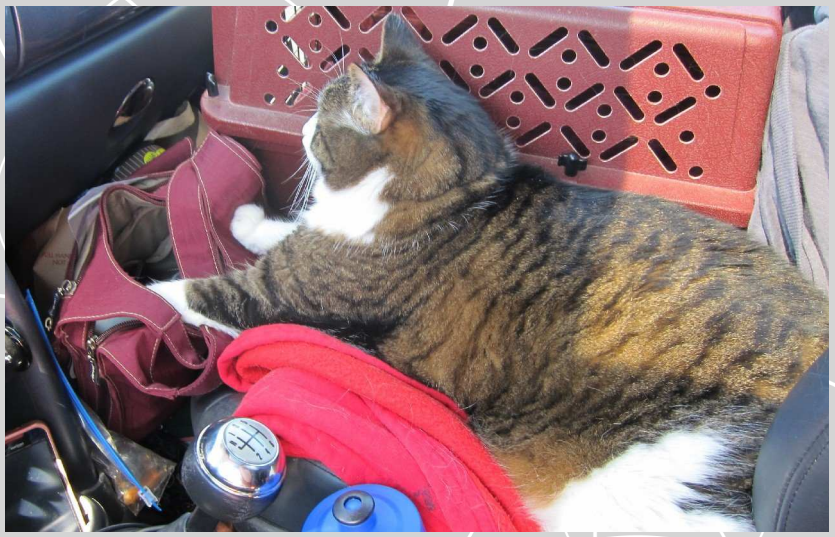
Near the tail end of my stay in Bozeman, my dad had a medical emergency and was air-lifted from Friday Harbor on San Juan Island to St. Joseph's Hospital in Bellingham. My step-mom Kay called the morning after, I made the decision to drive back the next day so I could get to my dad. Speckie was a trooper for the long 12-hour drive back to western Washington. She actually really enjoyed the view and loved sitting on my lap. At this point you could call her Speck "Adventure" Quaas.

Once we got to Everett, I figured that she had to go pee - duh - so I left the litter box in the driveway of my aunt's house while I went in to chat. She did her thing, and then got back in the car. Smart girl.

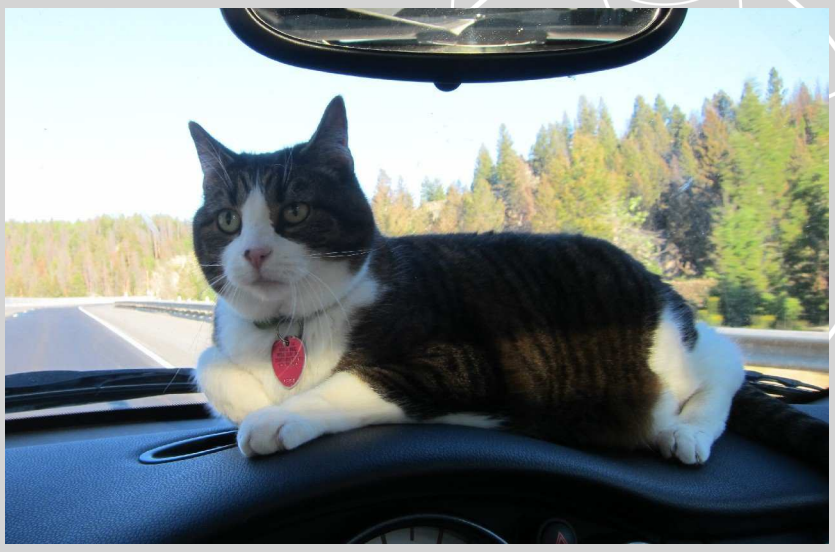
When we returned to Bellingham, we stayed at Oliver's apartment.

MINI





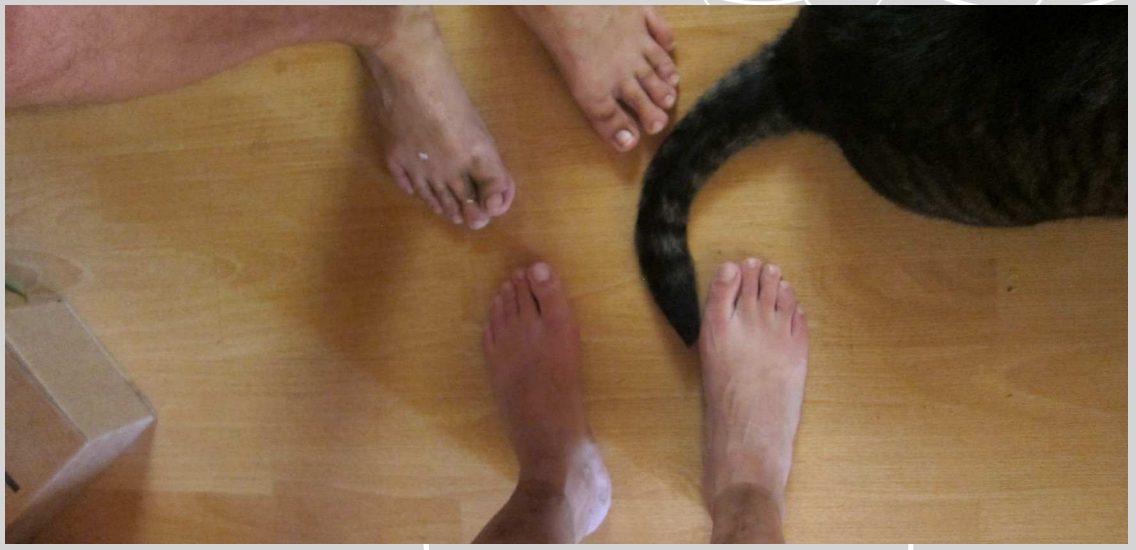
WASHINGTON
MONTH TAB
YEAR TAB
WSU
1001
GO COUGARS

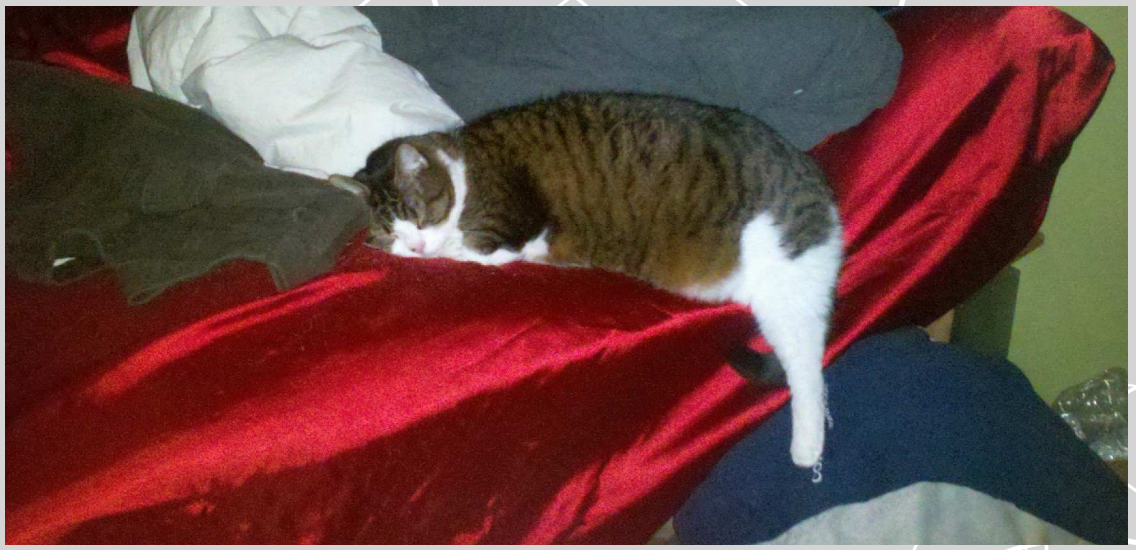


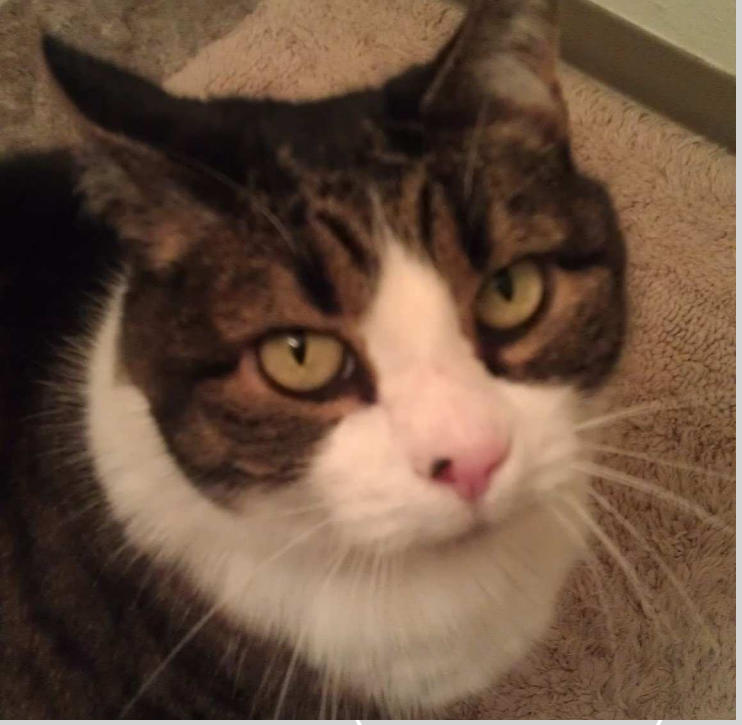
Bellingham, Washington 2011-2013

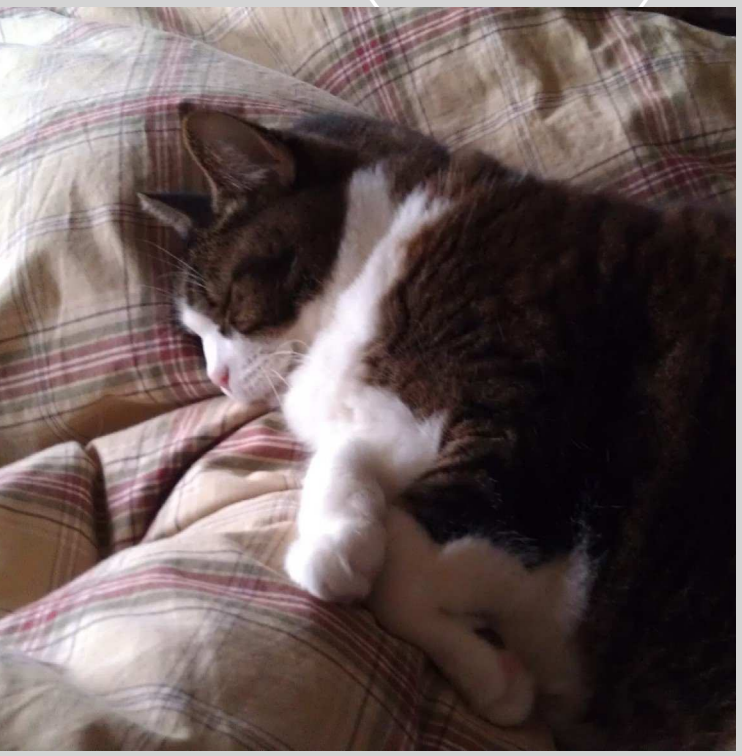
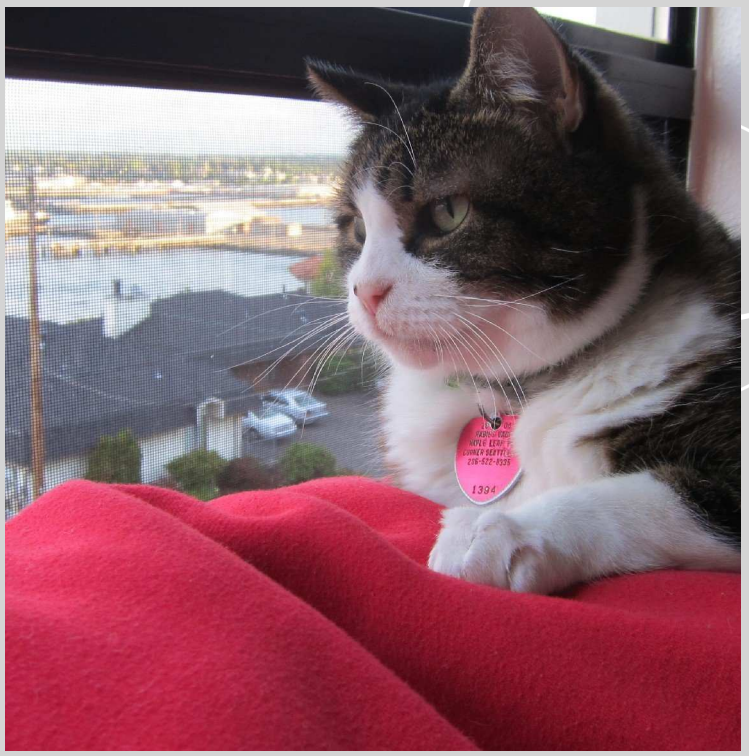
Knowing that my relationship with Oliver was growing, Speck and I moved up in the fall of 2011 to our own apartment overlooking Bellingham Bay. We lived here together for seven months. At times, she stayed with Oliver when I had to attend conferences. She always liked Oliver.

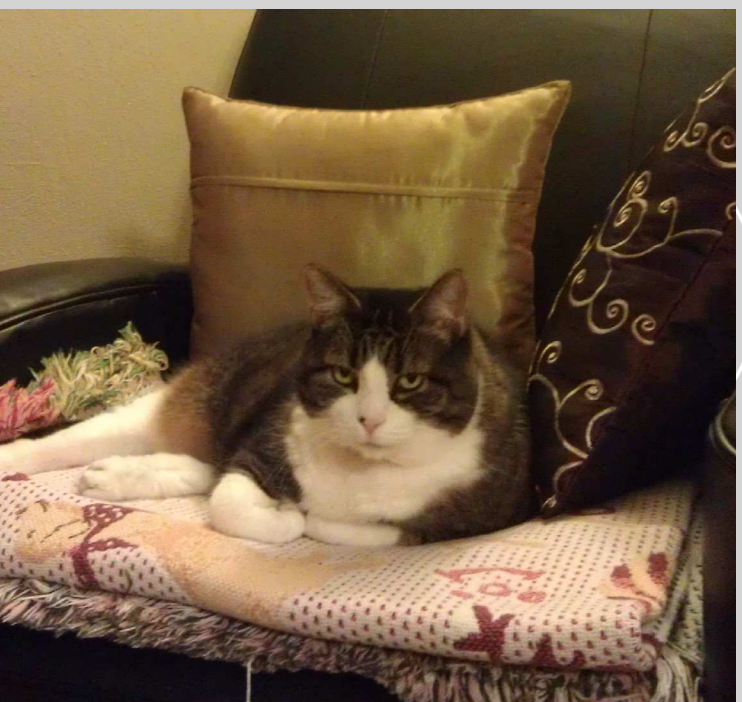
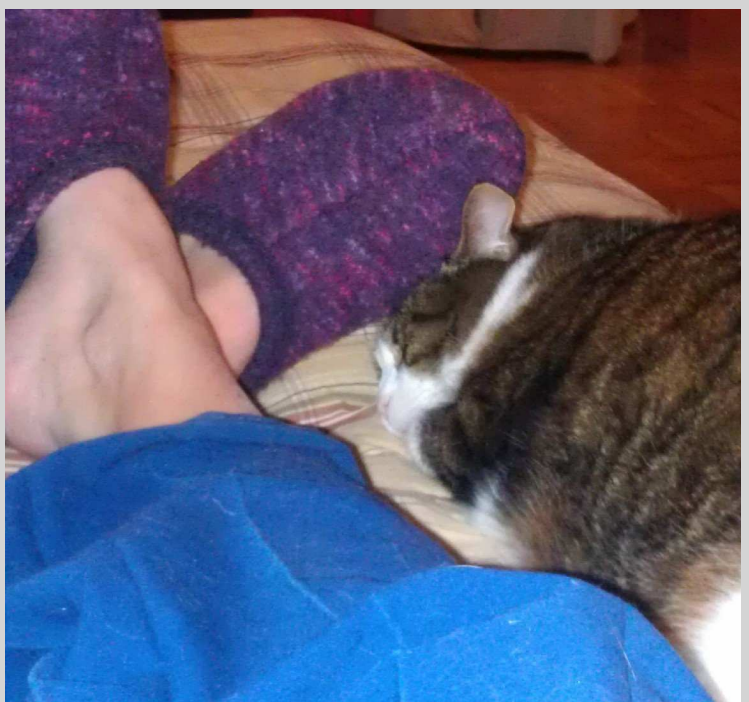
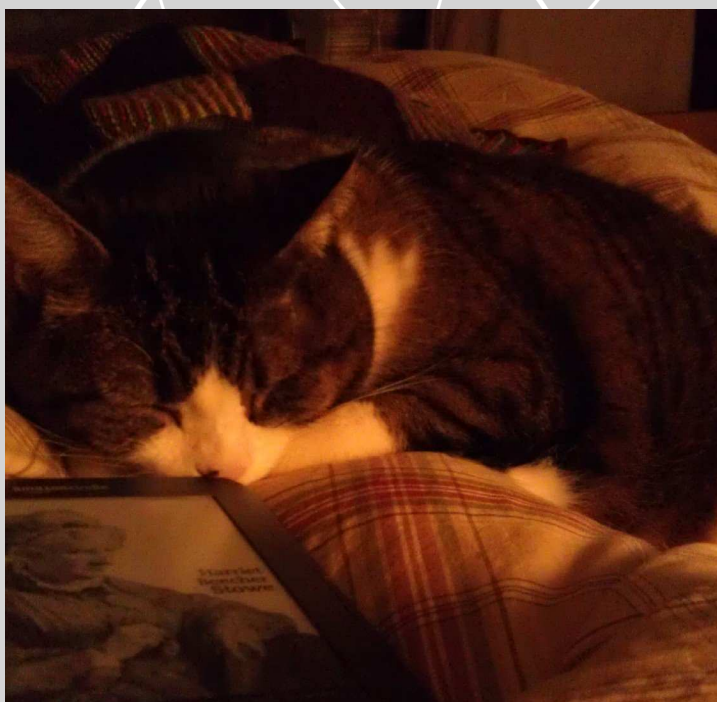
Speck continued to roll with whatever / wherever we were. The most important thing was that we were together. What an understanding and adaptable cat she was.



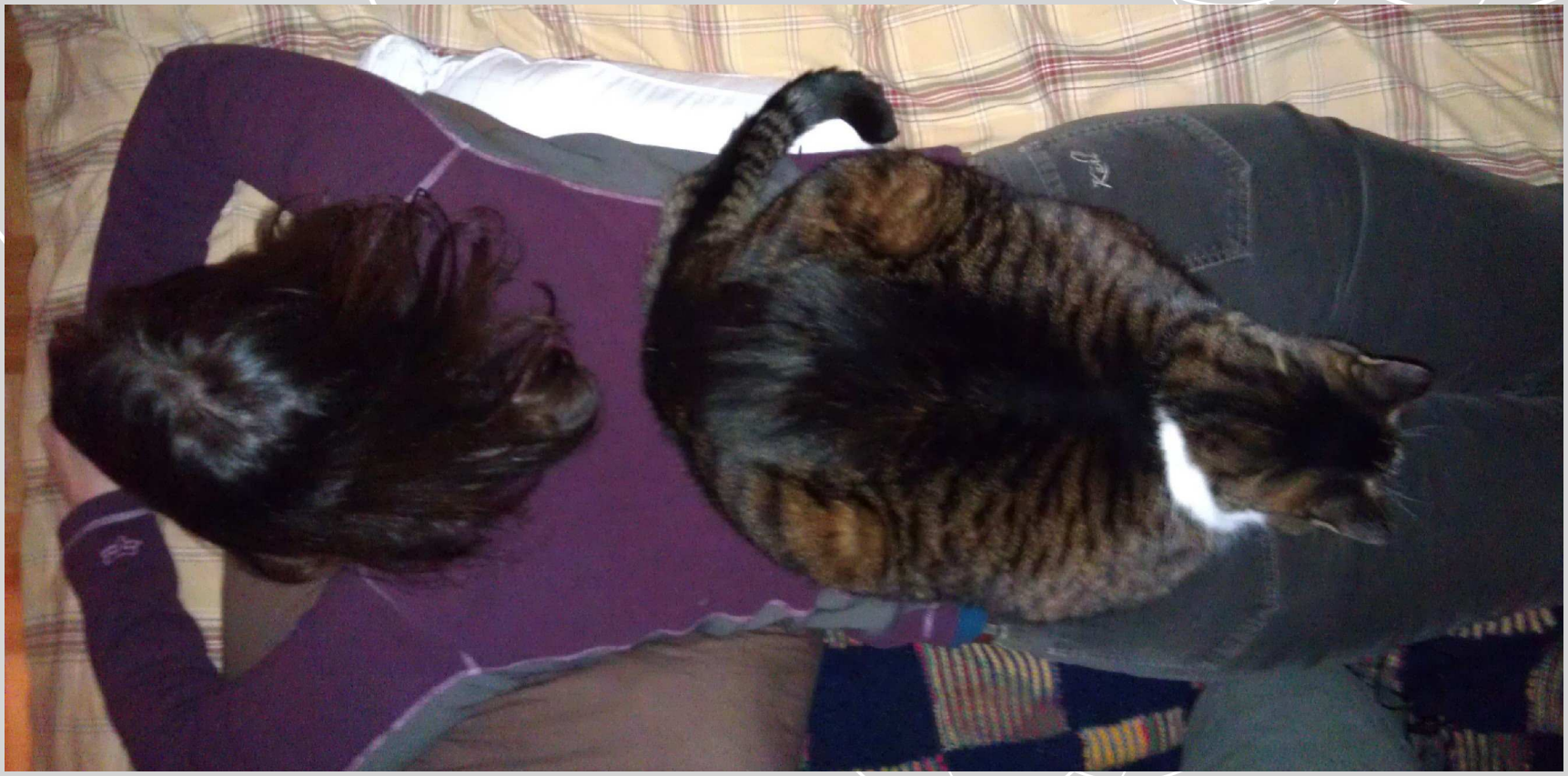


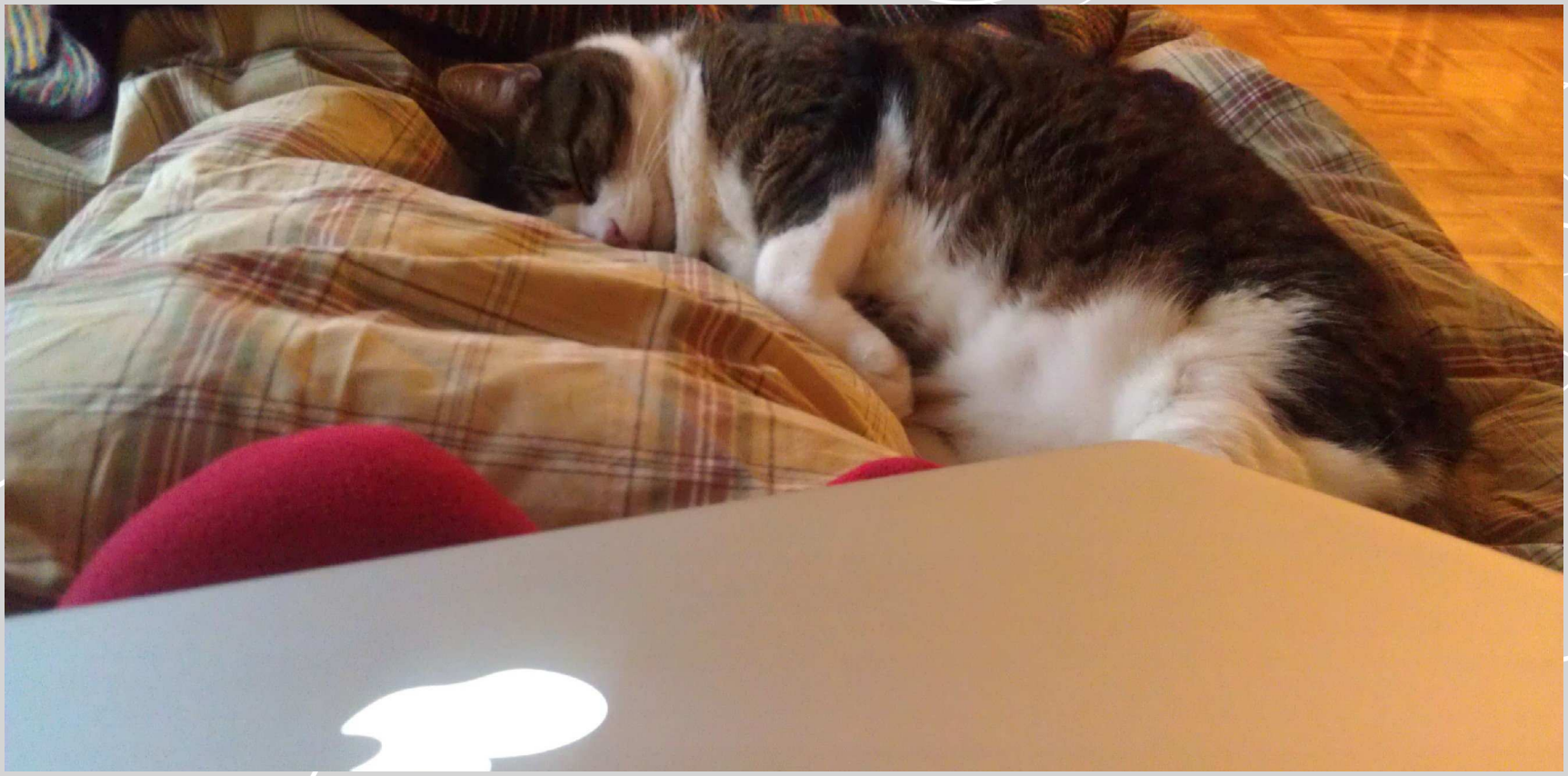


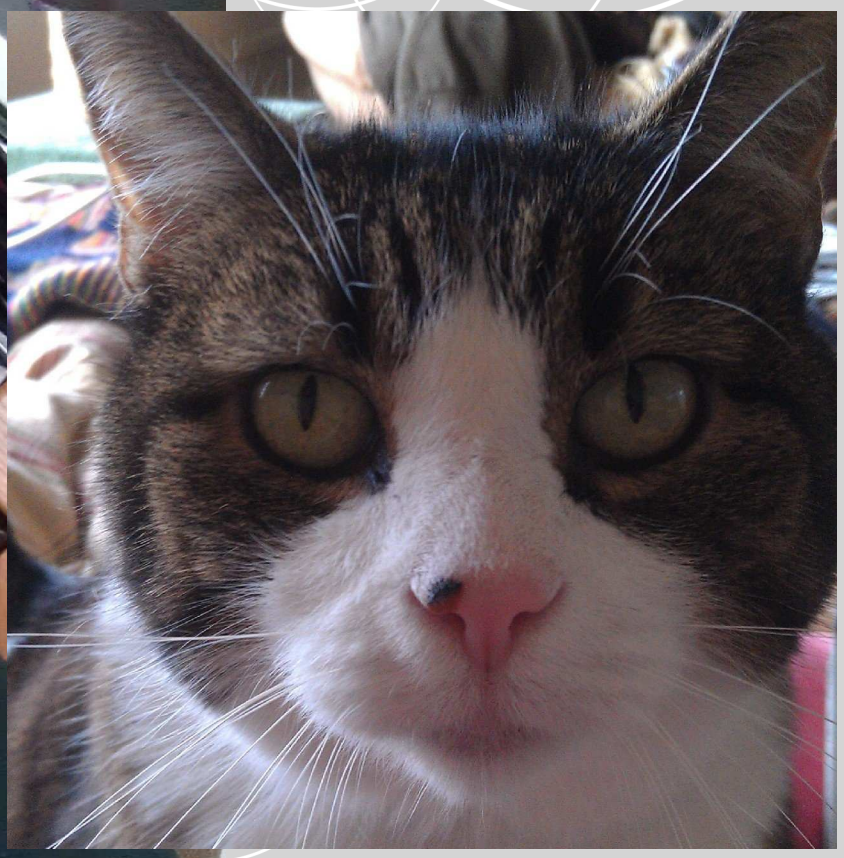



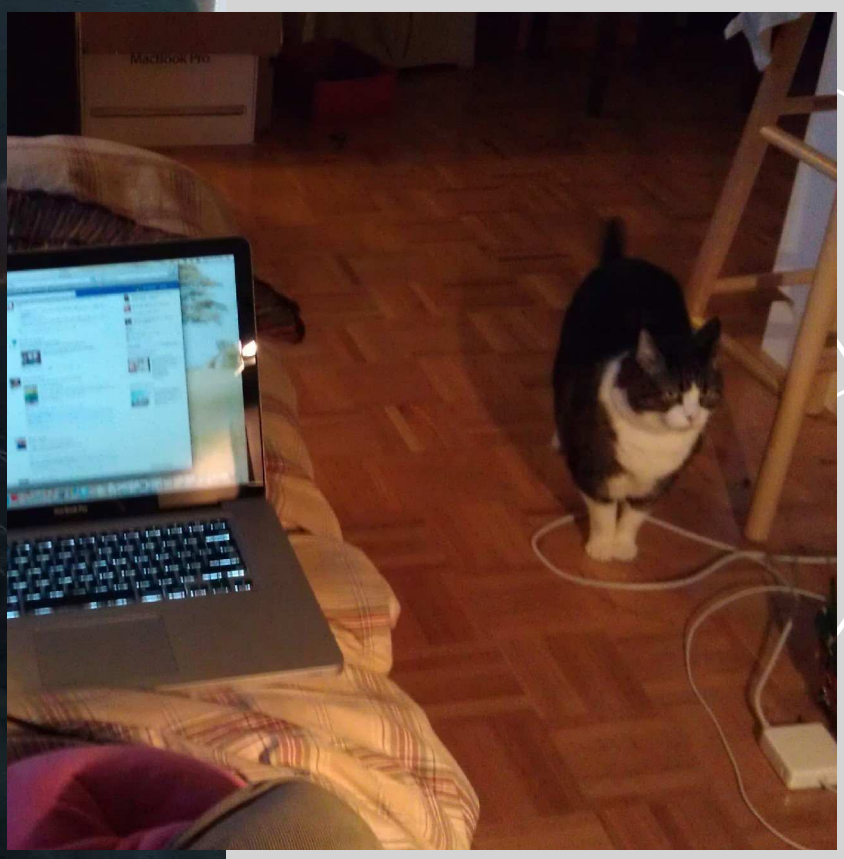




Speck =^.^=

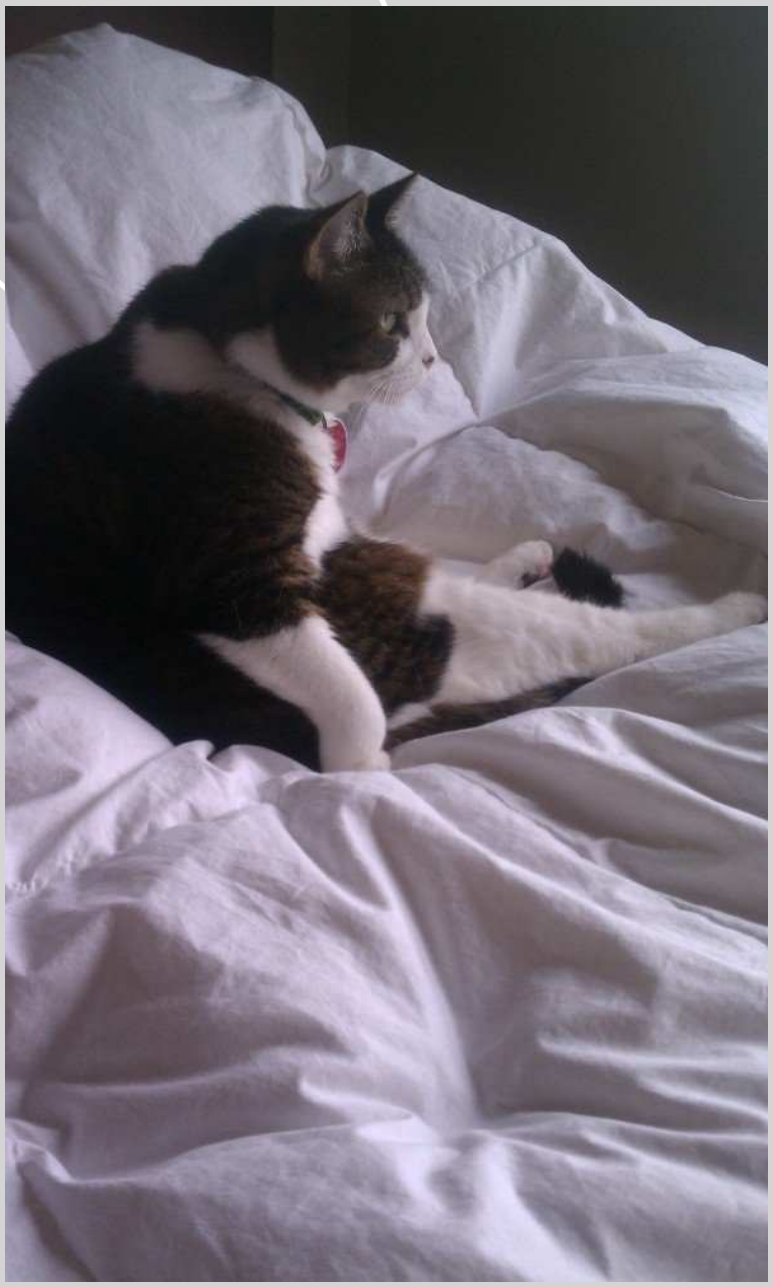






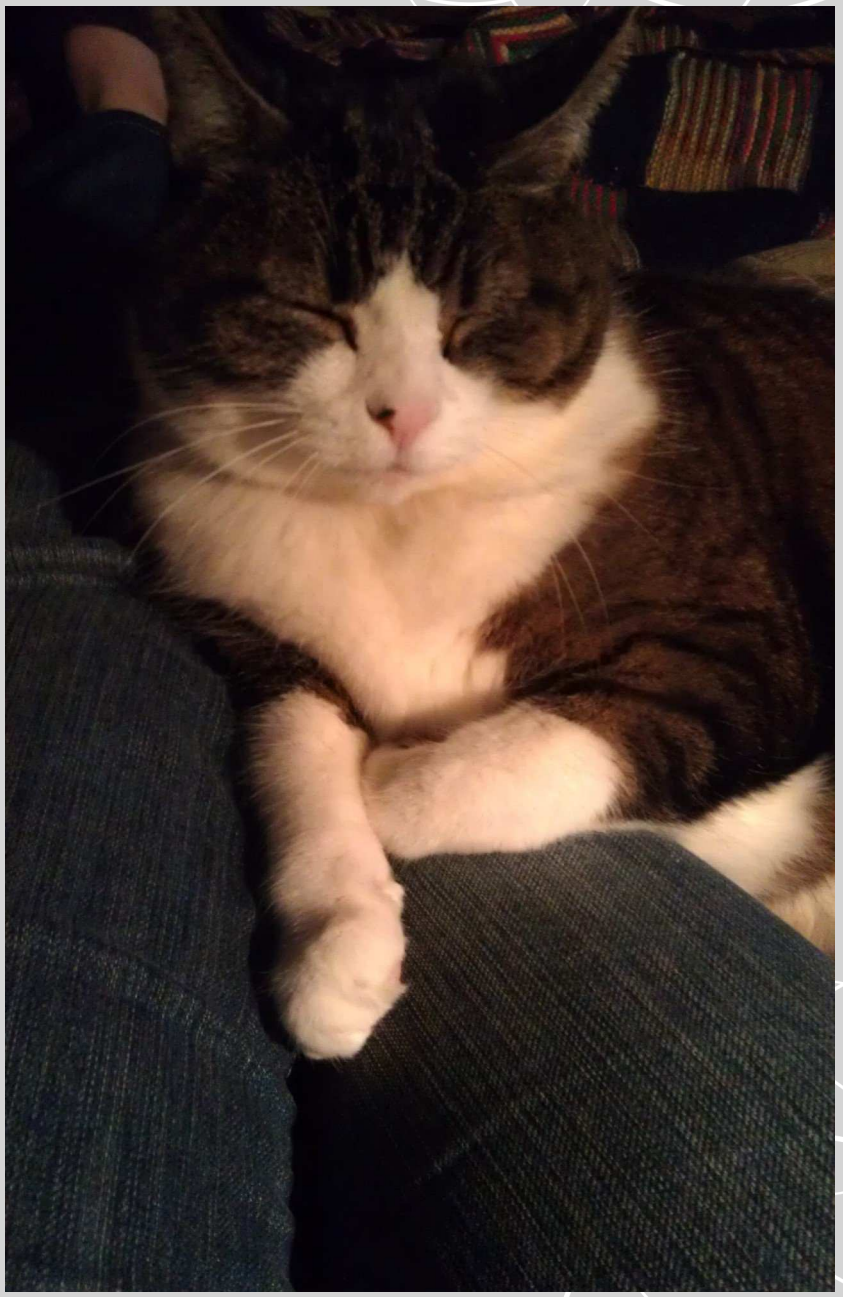


Speck =^.^=



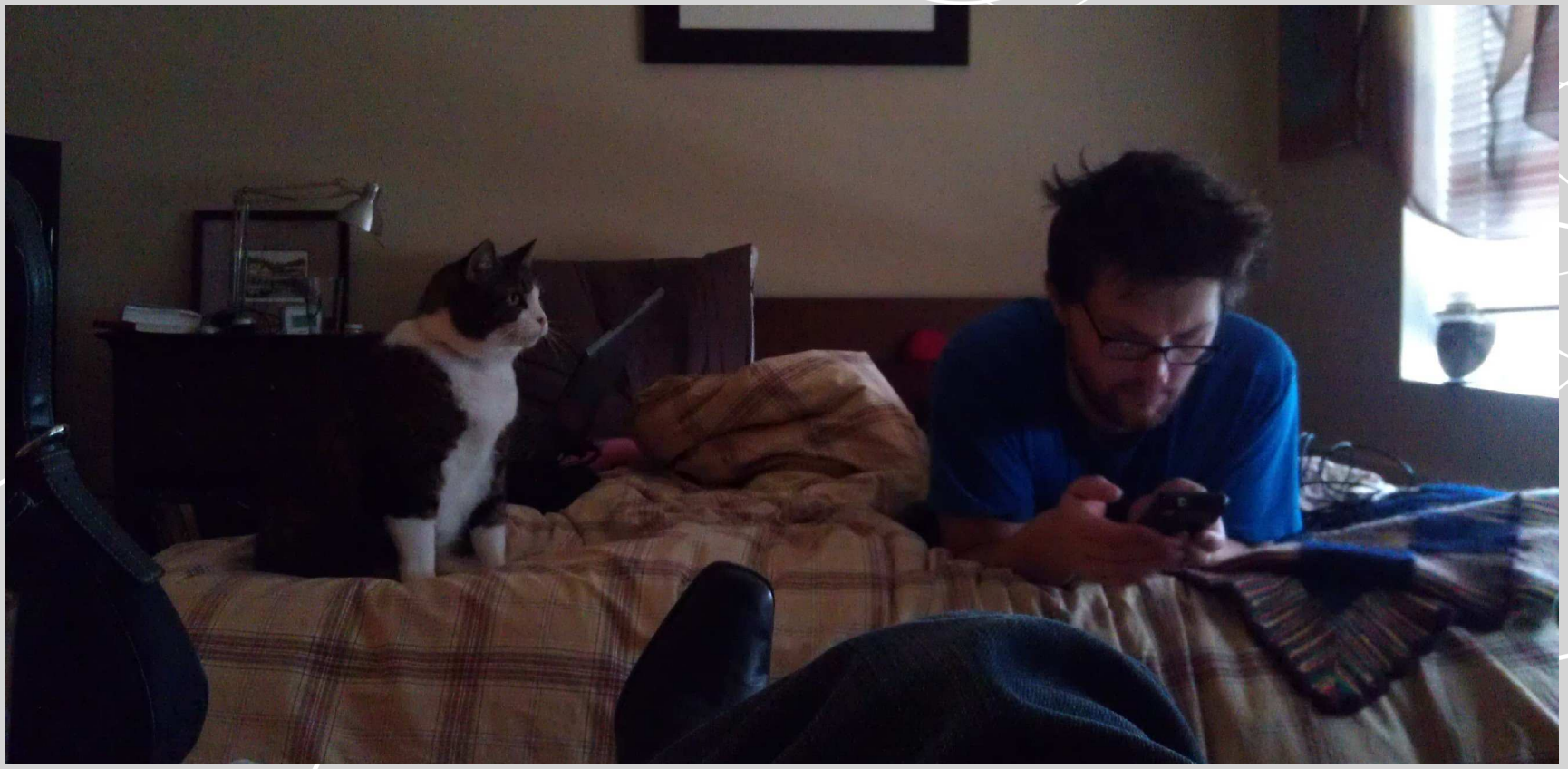
“Cats are people, and the sooner the world accepts that fact, the better off the world will be.”

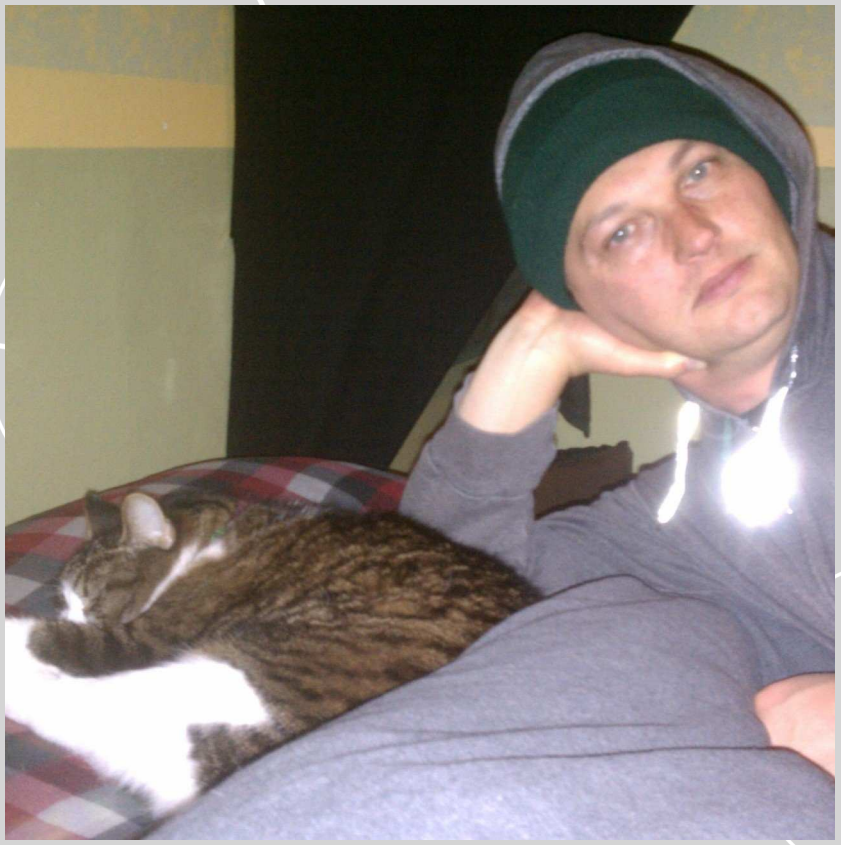
~ H. Allen Smith, Rhubarb

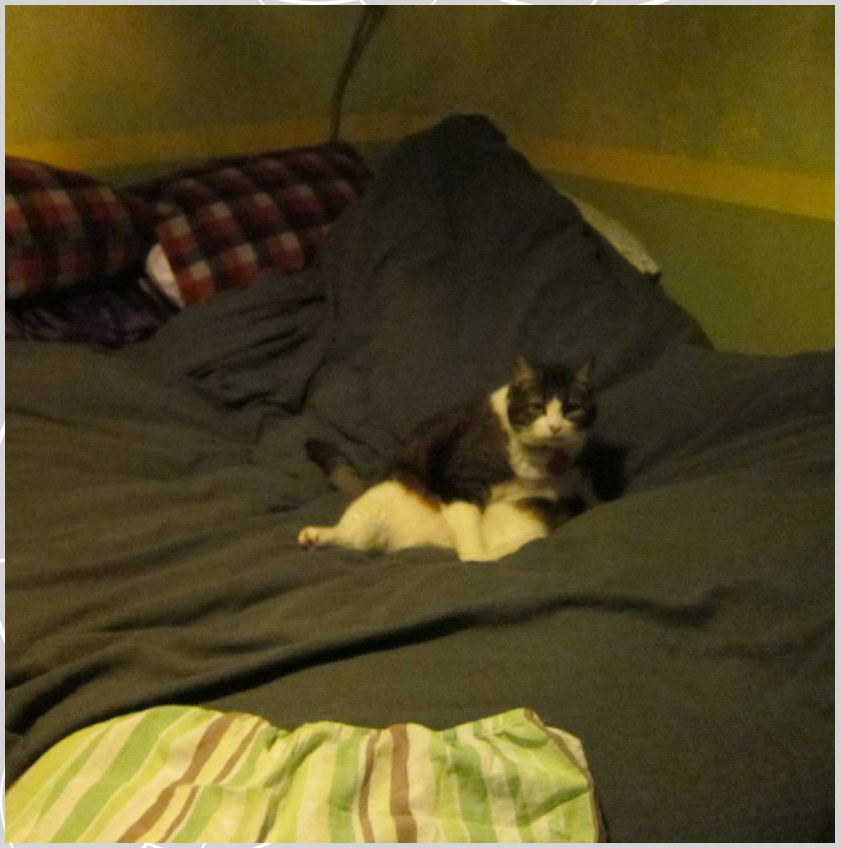


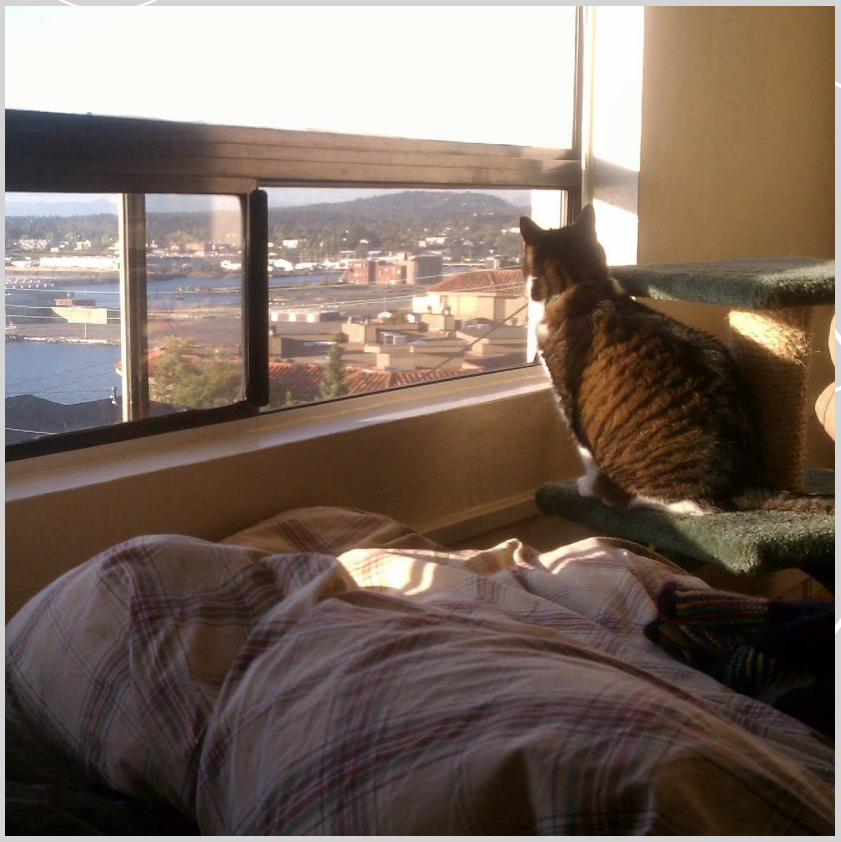
Right:
The view of the sunset behind
Lummi Island and Orcas Island
from our apartment.

Speck =^.^=



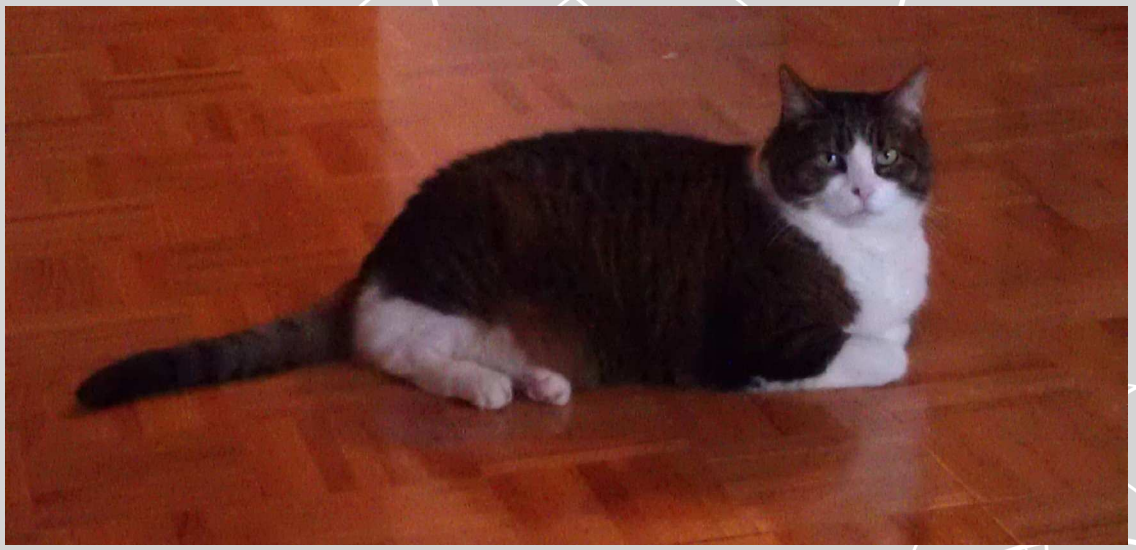


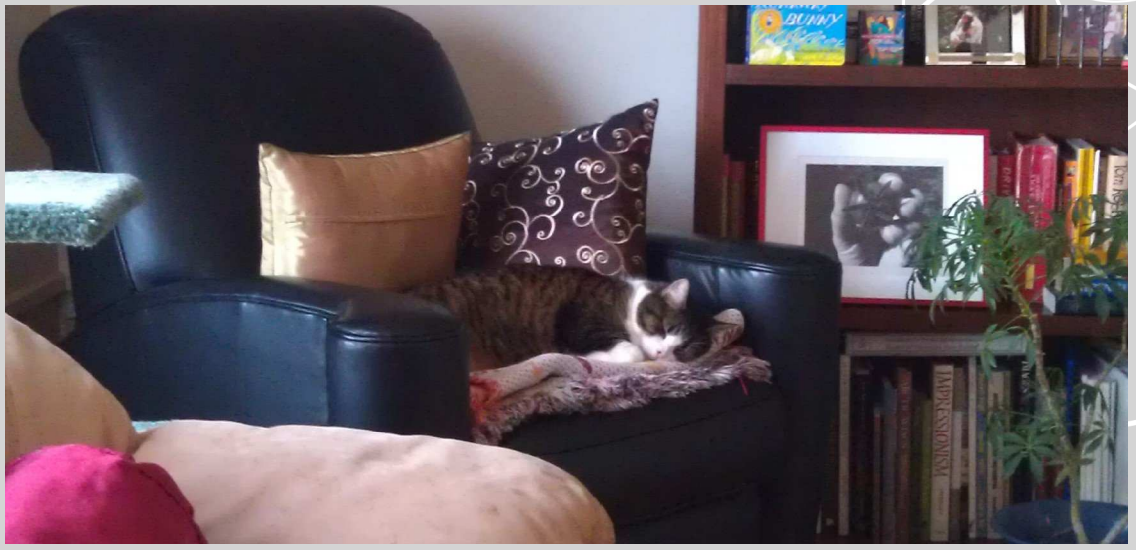


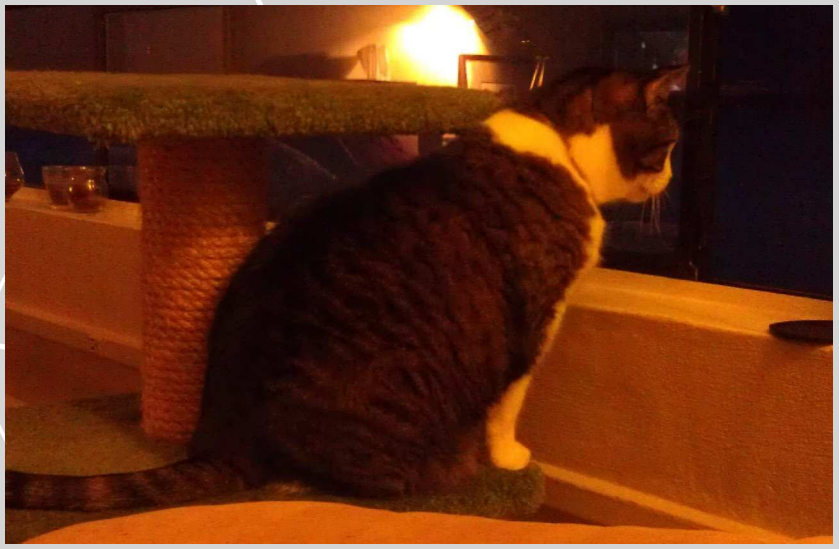


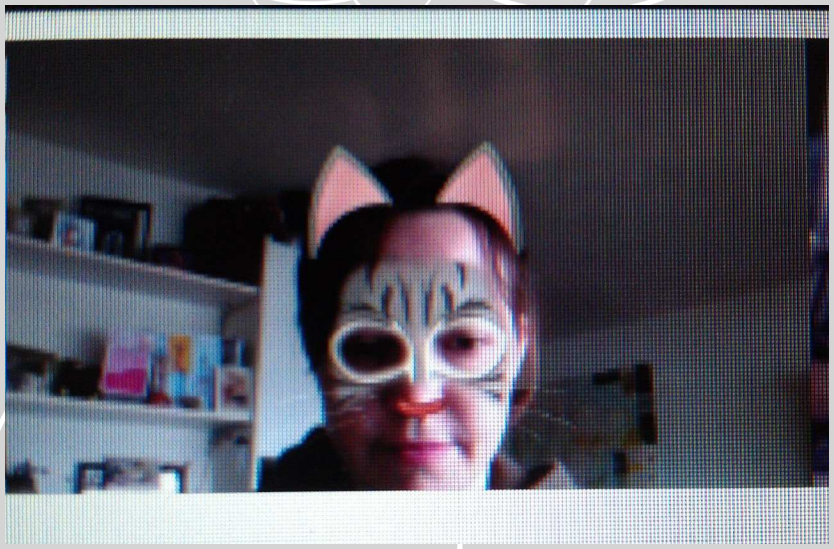
“What greater gift than the love of a cat.”

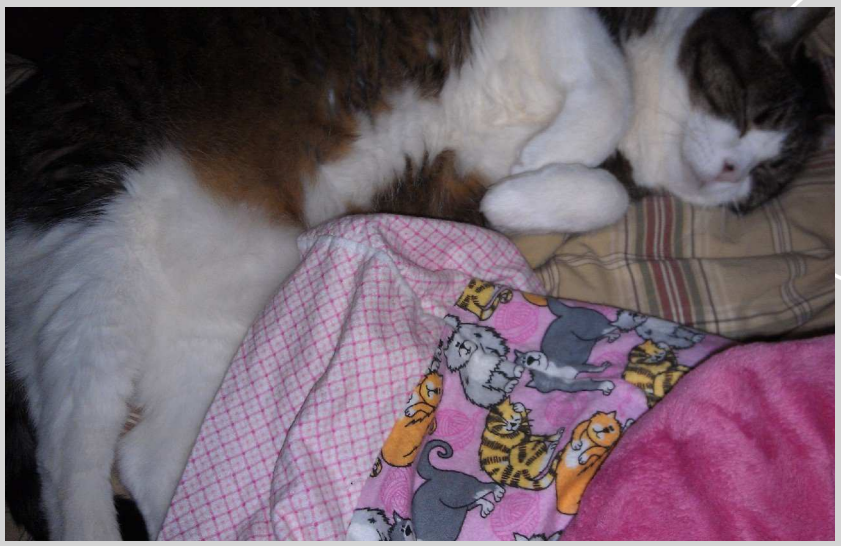
— Charles Dickens



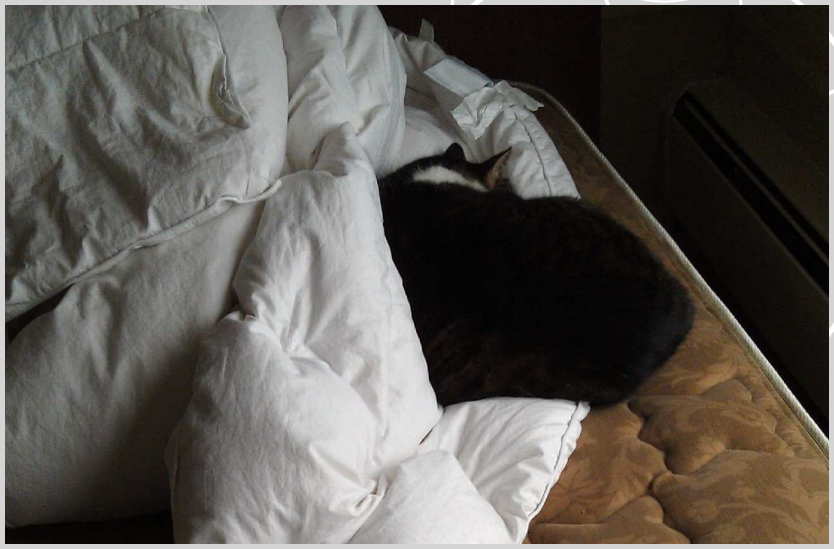








MEOW

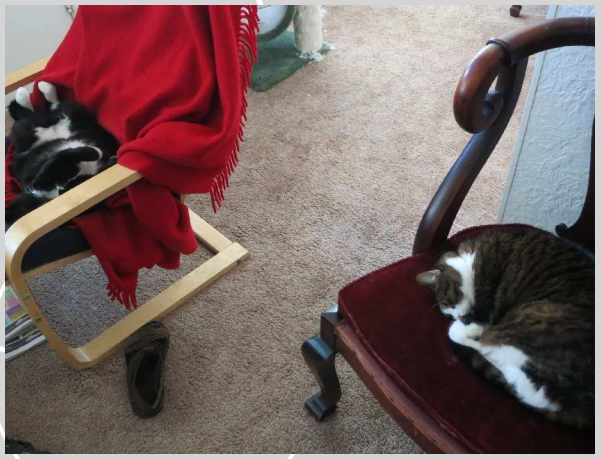


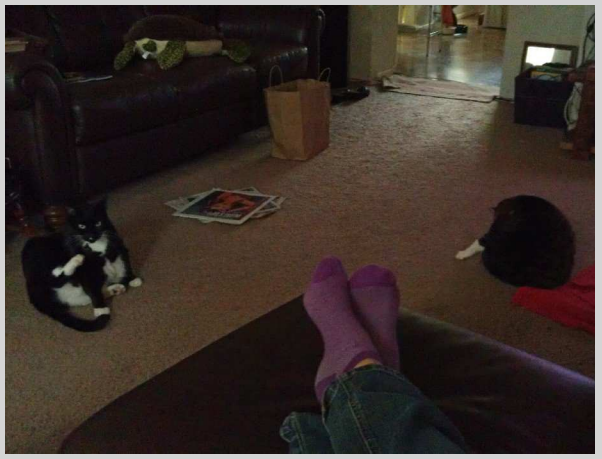
Speck =^.^=

In May of 2012, Oliver and I, with our two cats, moved into the Banana Bungalow. It's a long story of how we ended up at 2610 Peabody, but alls well that ends well. It was here that Speck really got to know her sister kitten, Roxy Coke-Nose, Bitches, Tufts on Ears....

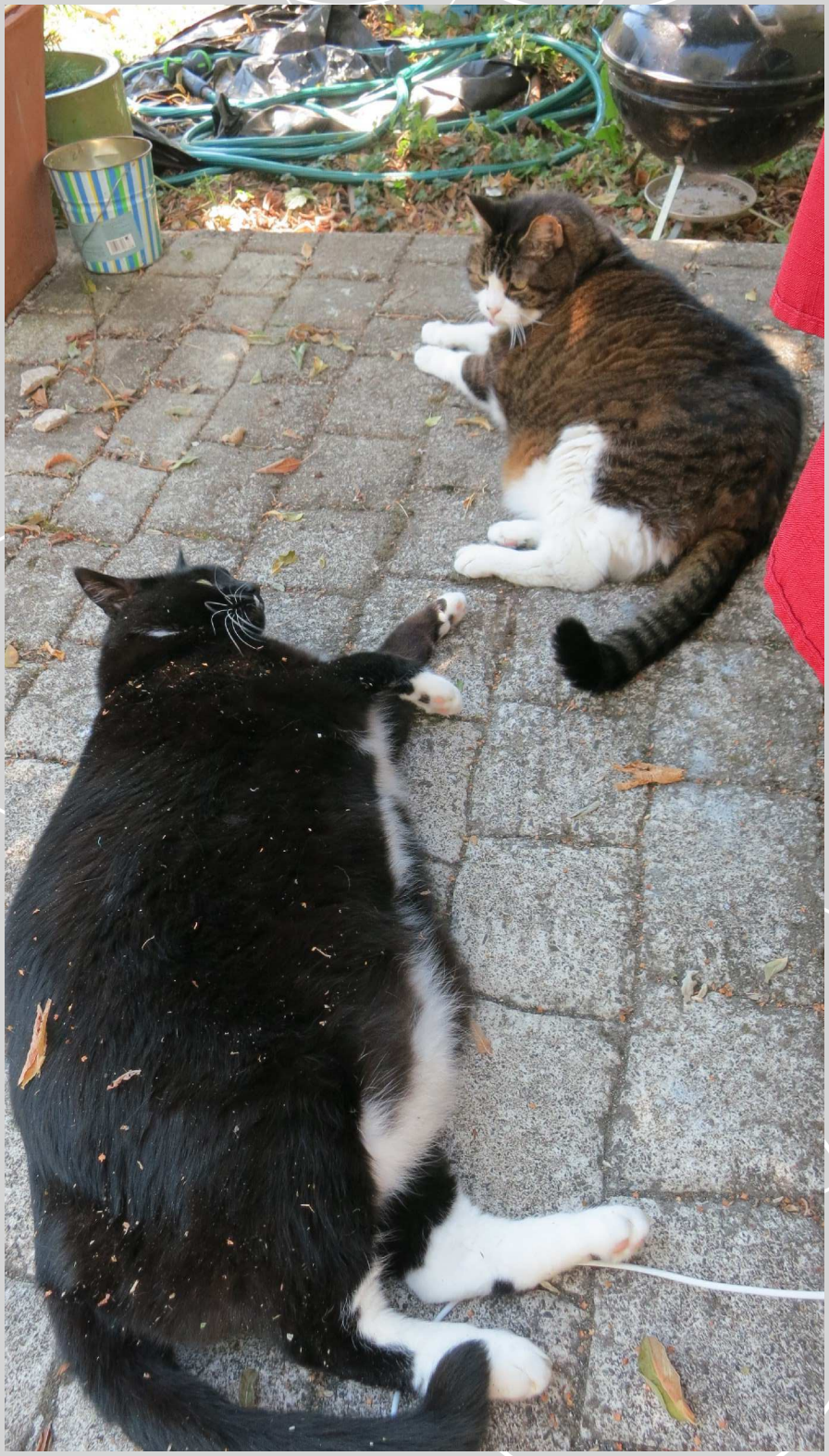
“One cat just leads to another."

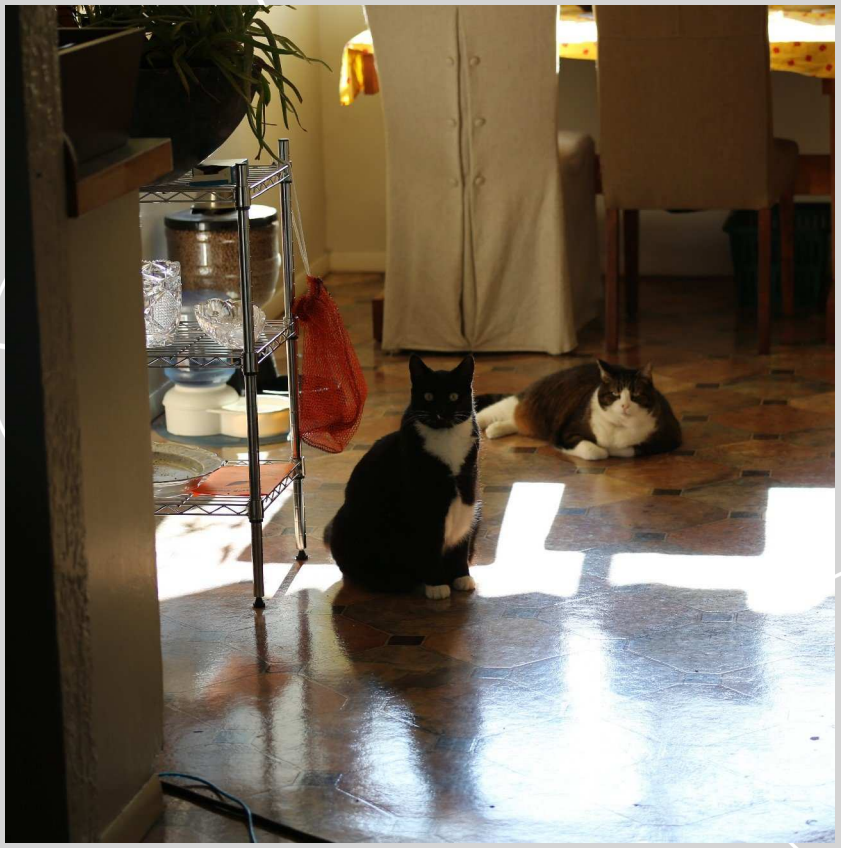
[Letter from Finca Vigia, Cuba, to his first wife, Elizabeth Hadley Richardson (1943).]”
— Ernest Hemingway, Selected Letters 1917-1961

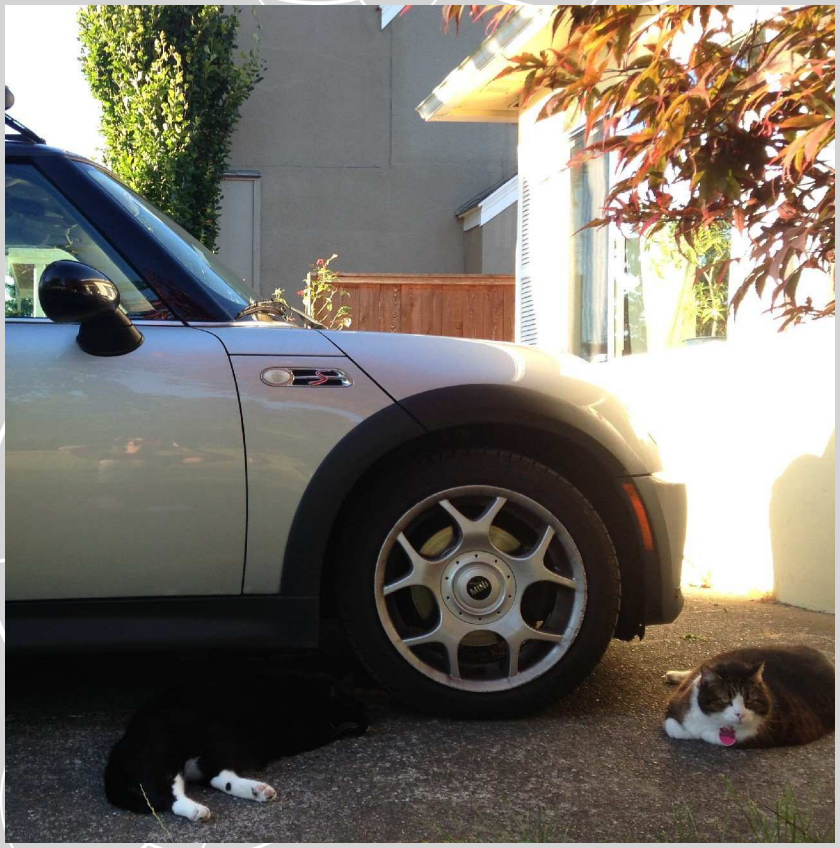


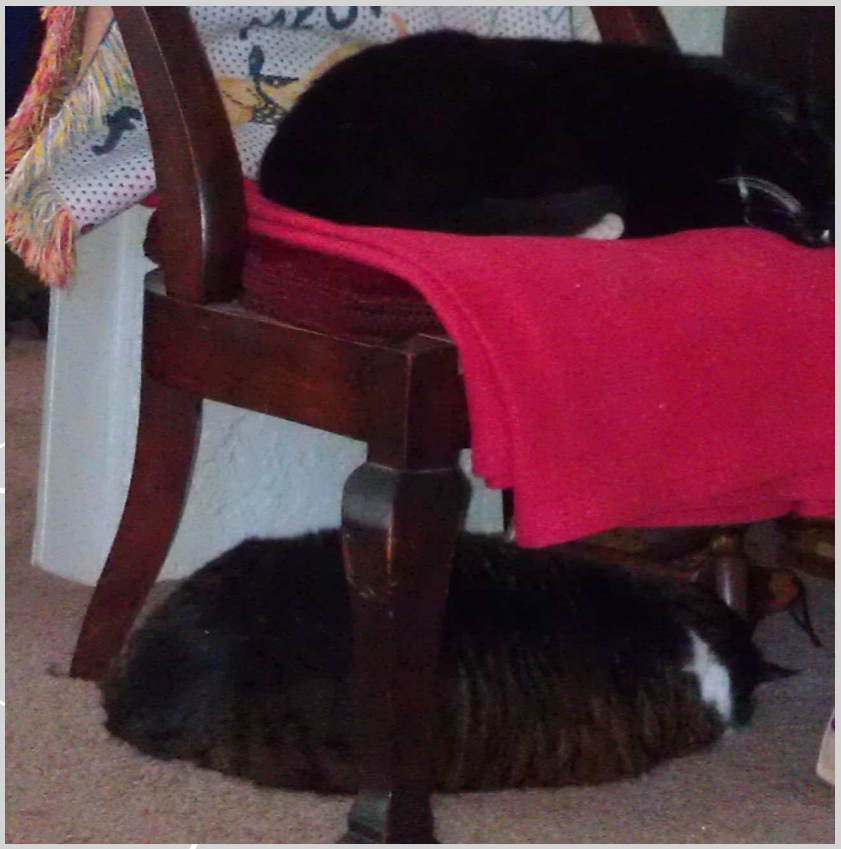


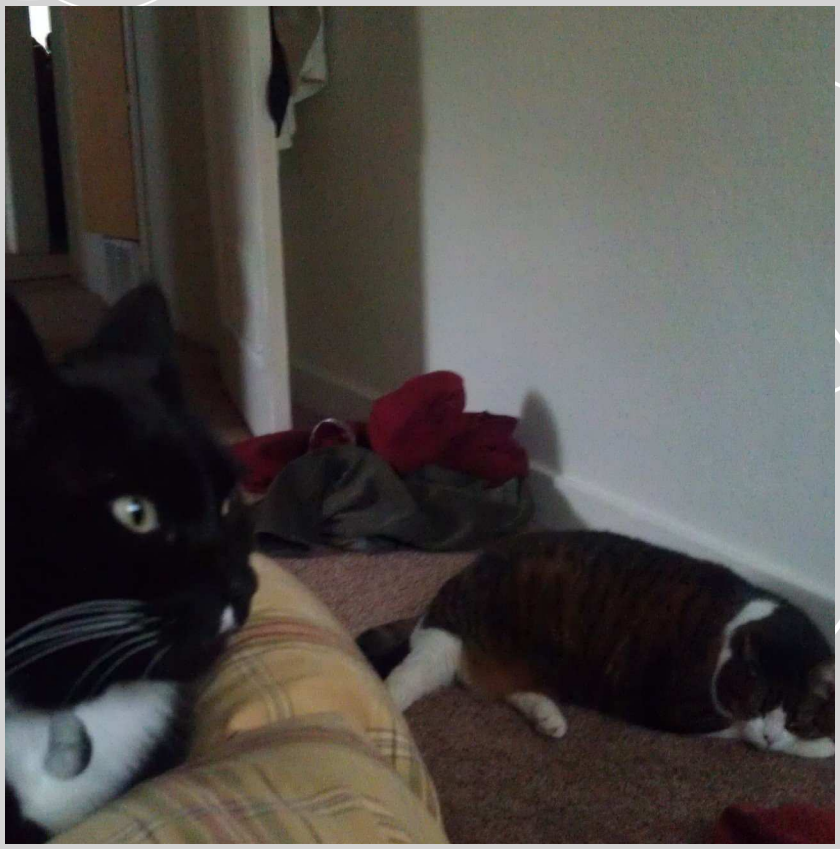
Over time, they became good friends. :-)

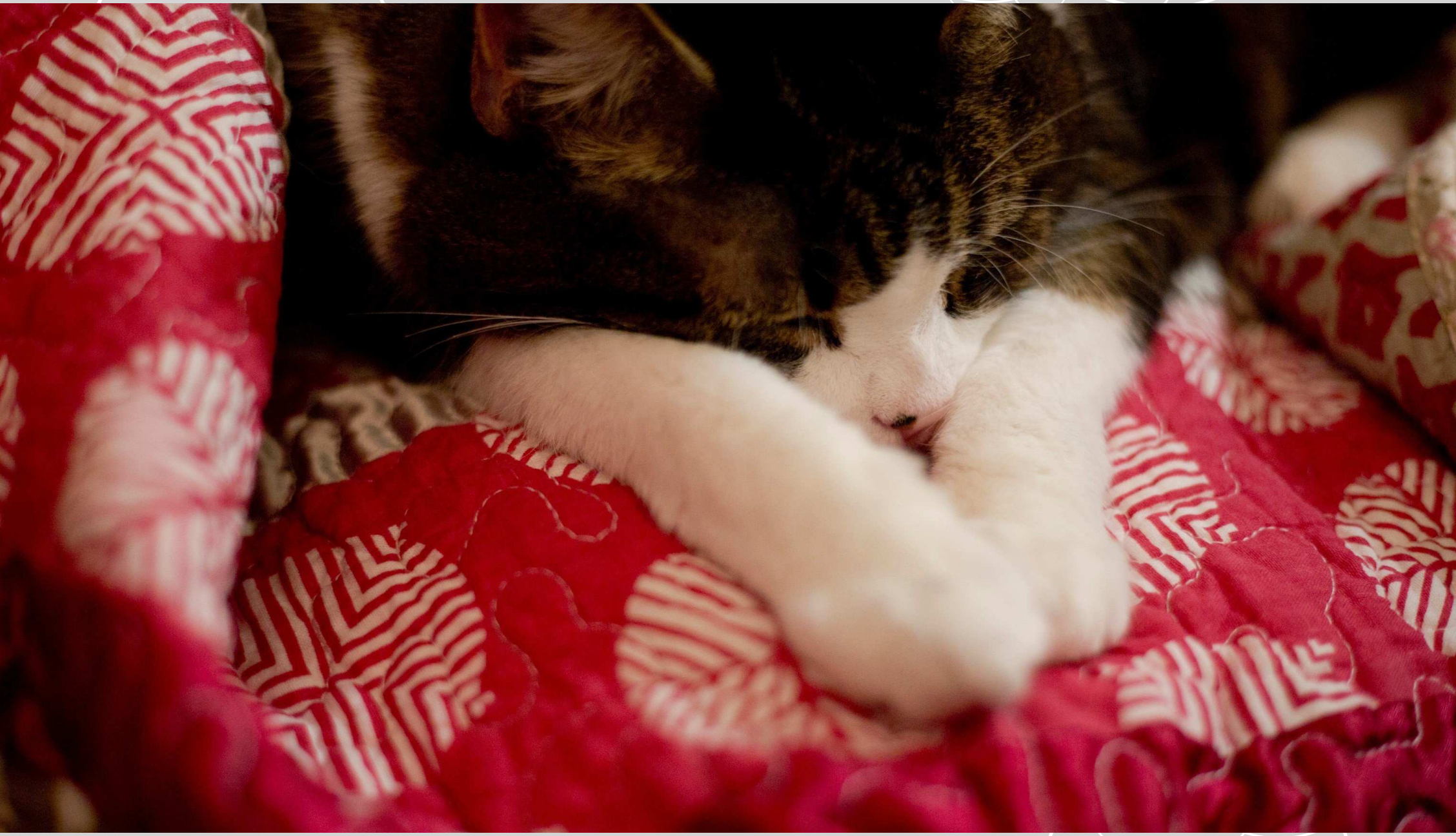






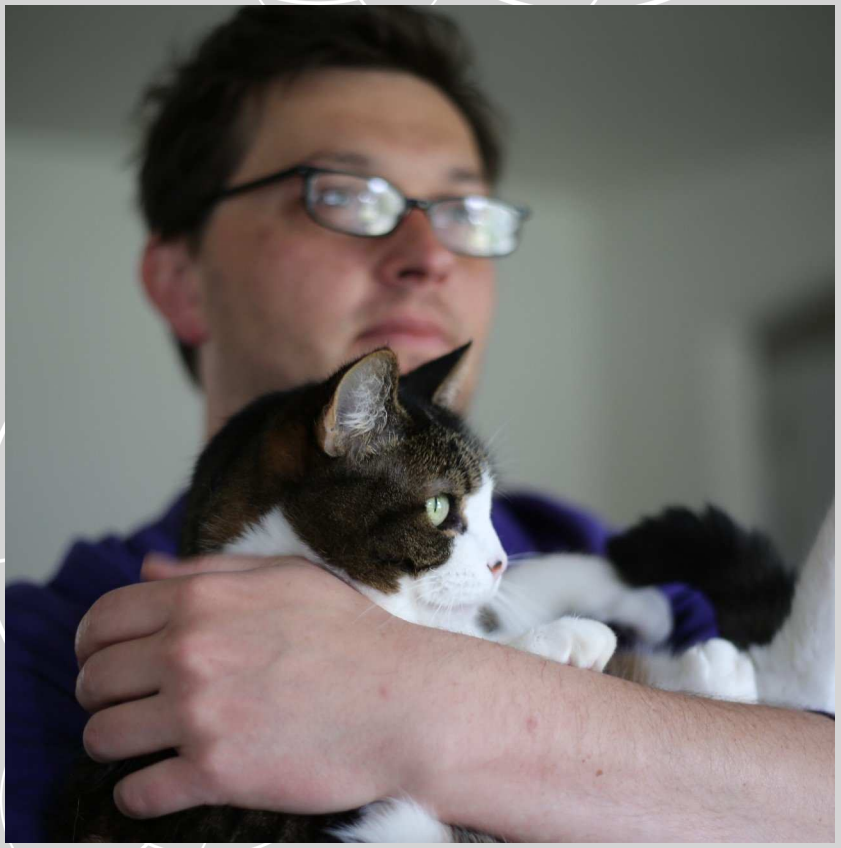


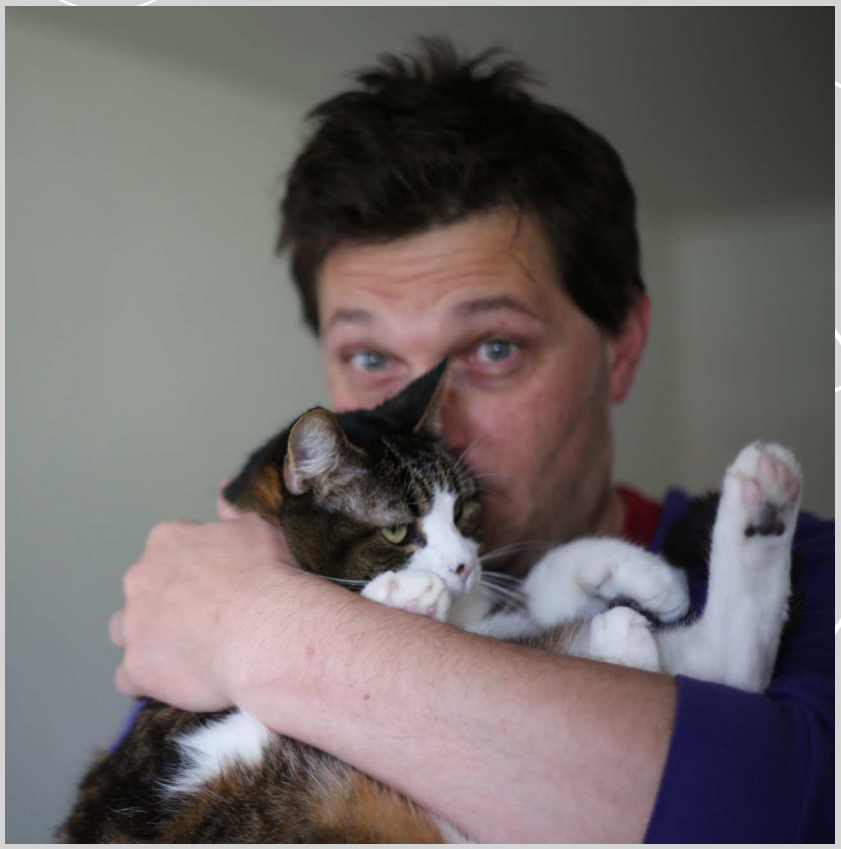




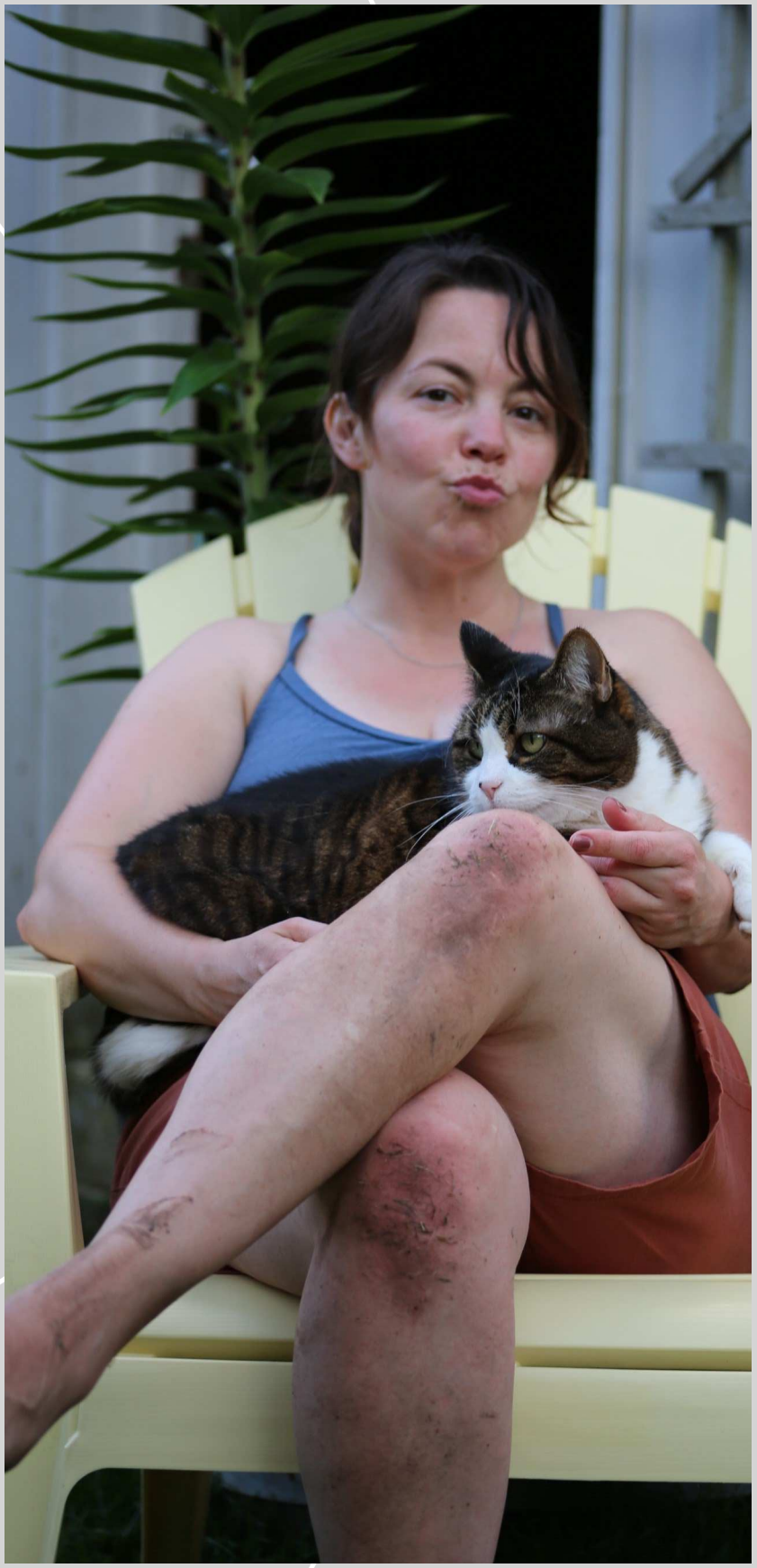
“There is, incidentally, no way of talking about cats that enables one to come off as a sane person.”

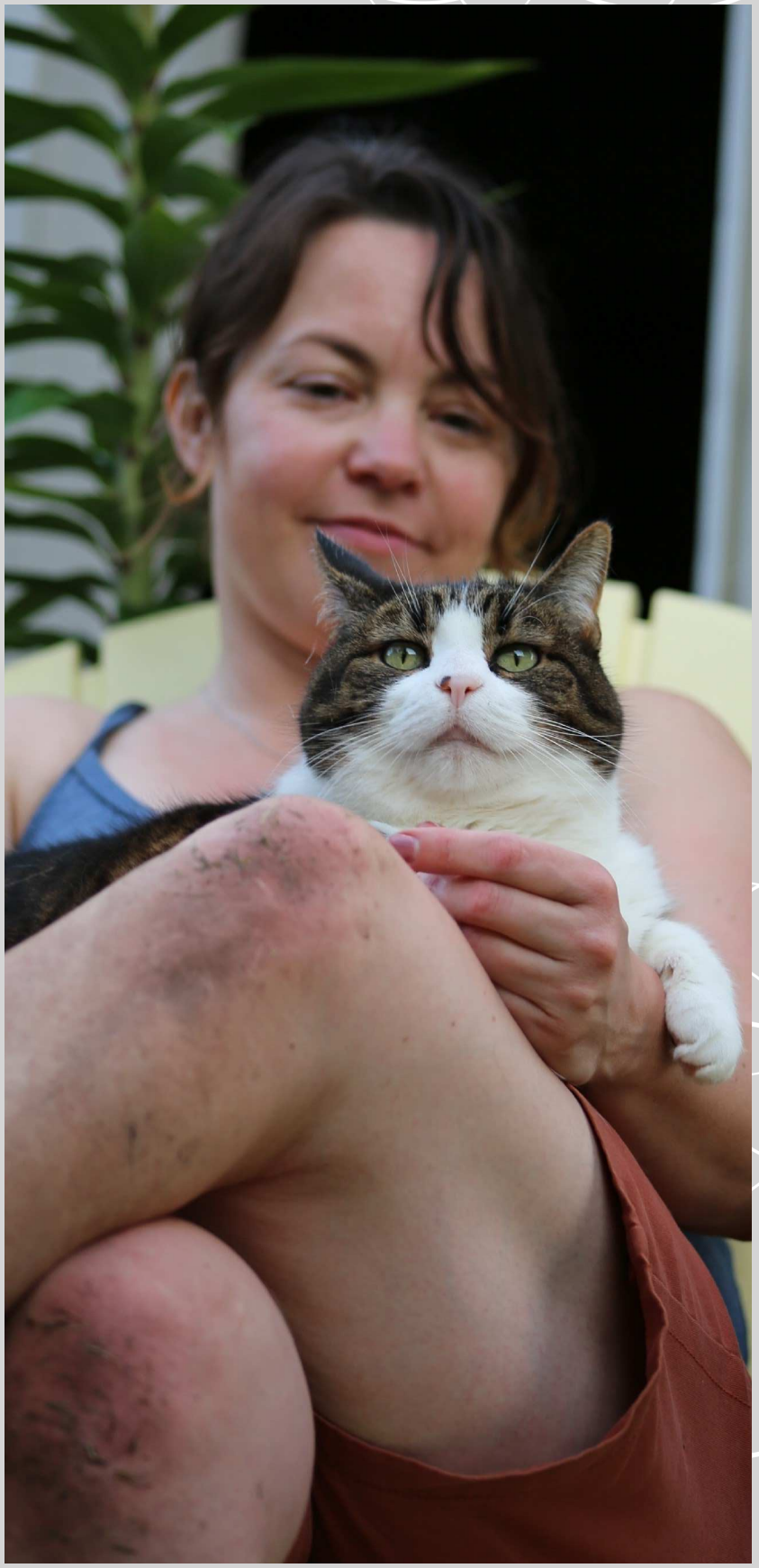
~ Dan Greenberg

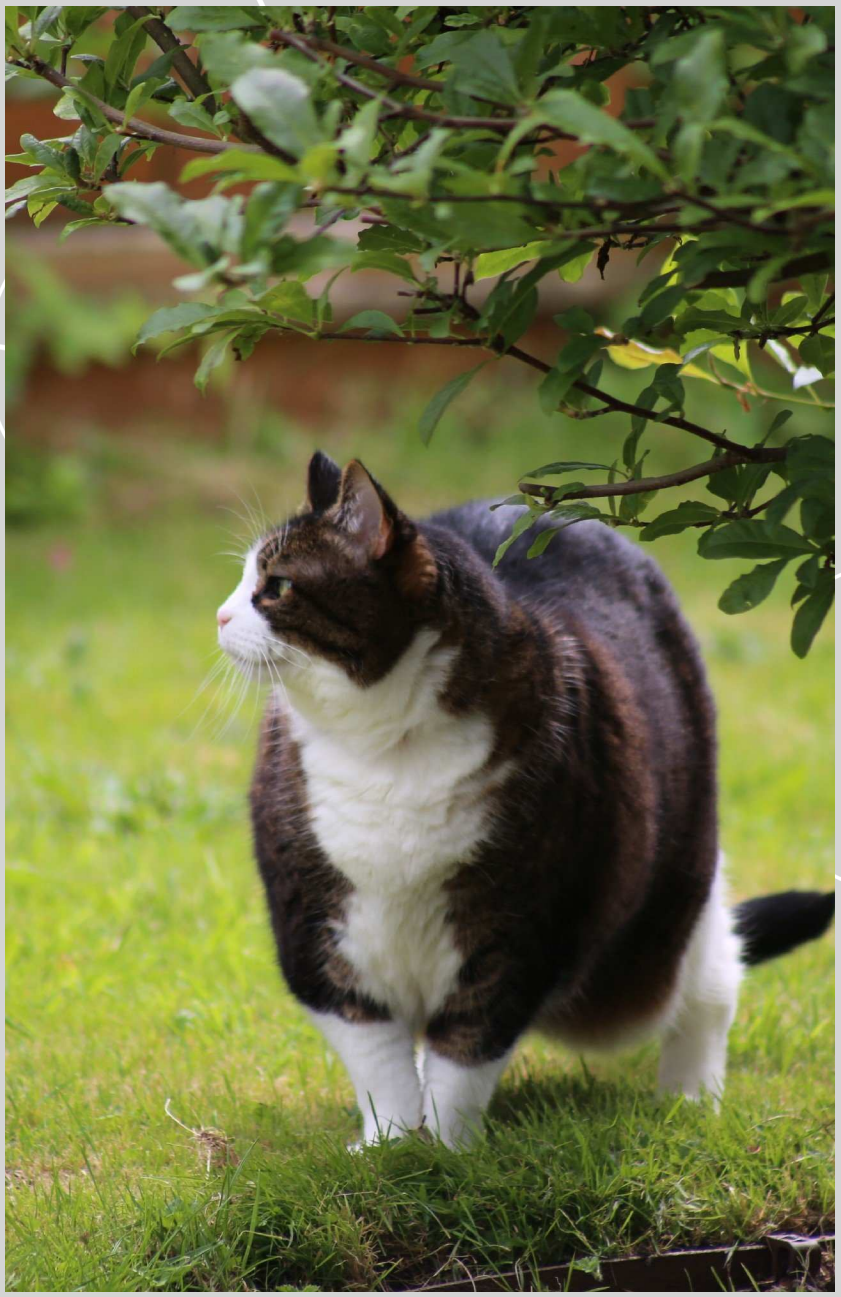


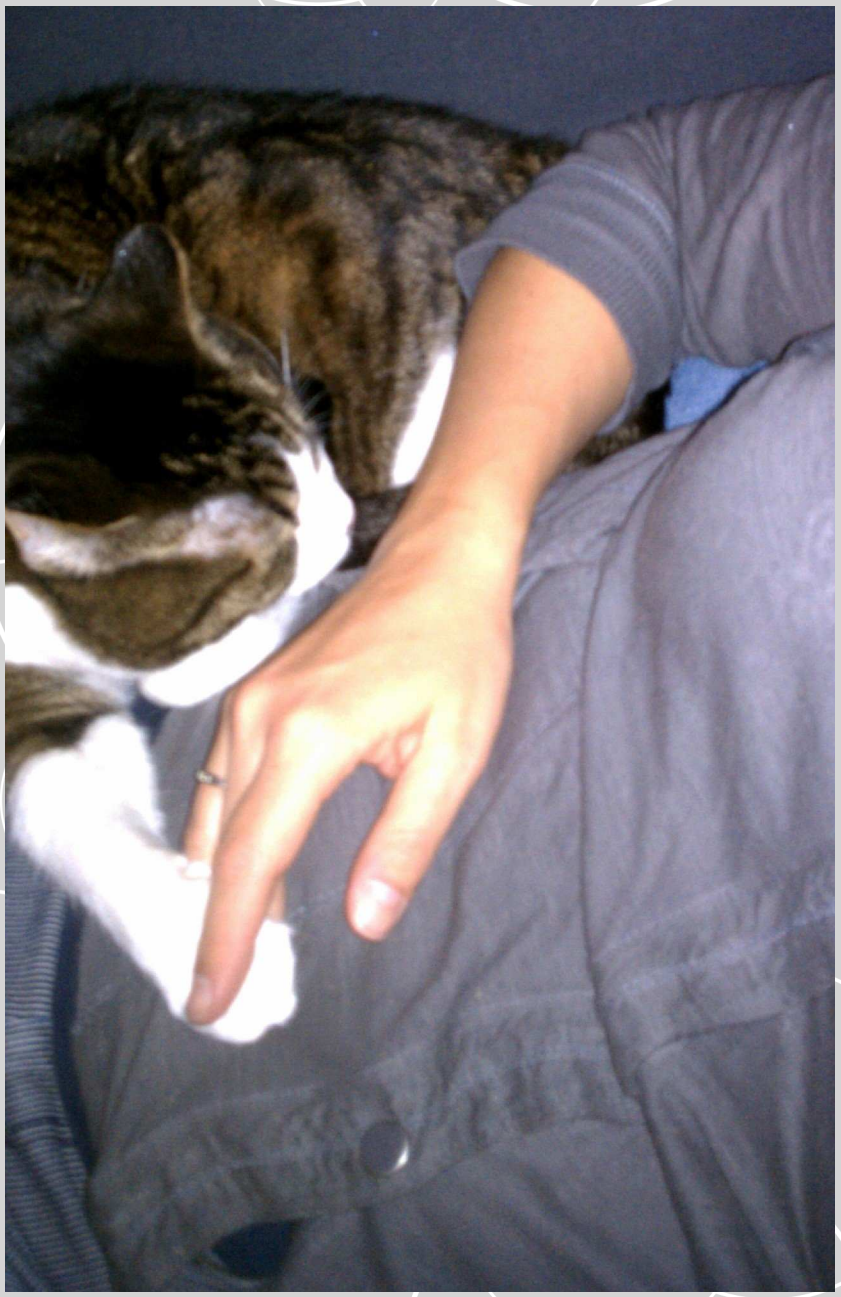


Speck =^.^=

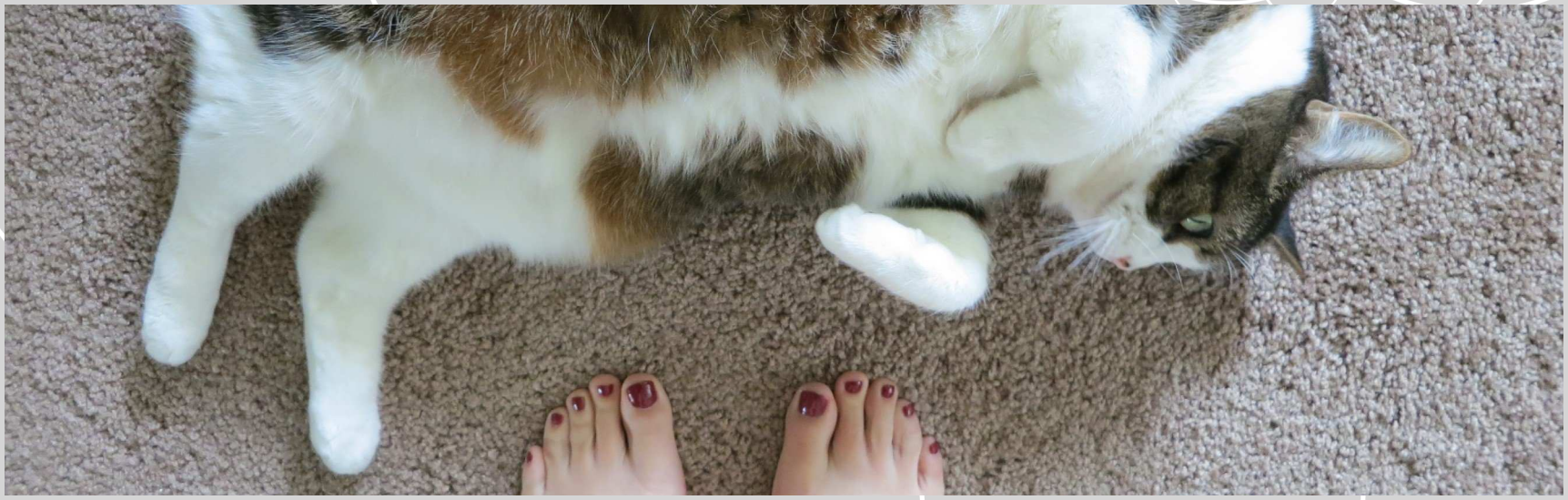




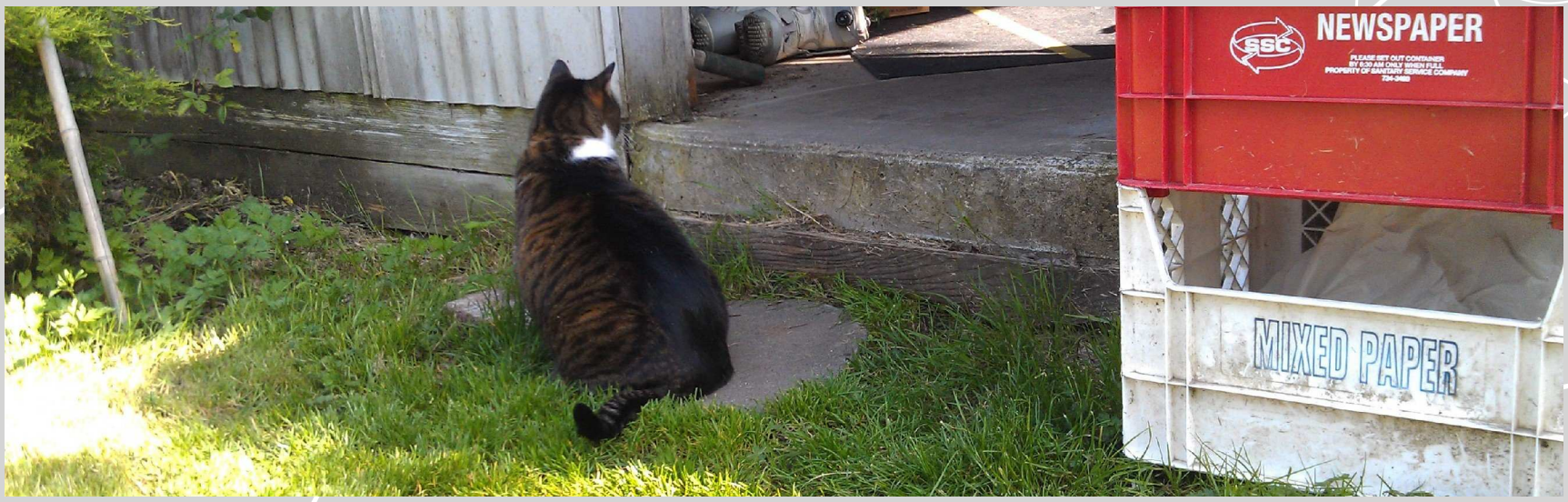




July 2012



More evidence of Speck's rough life...
©2012 Kari Quaas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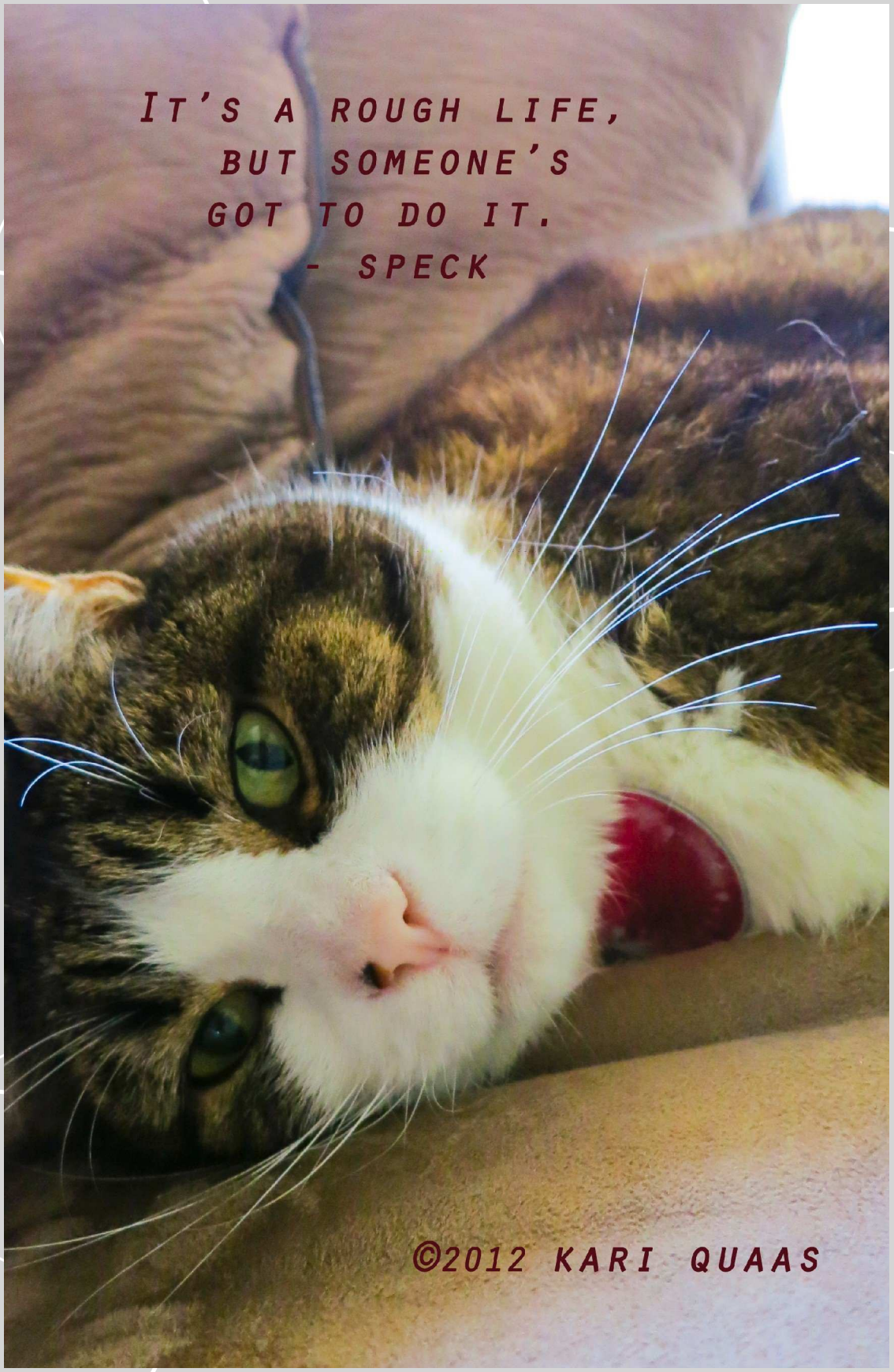
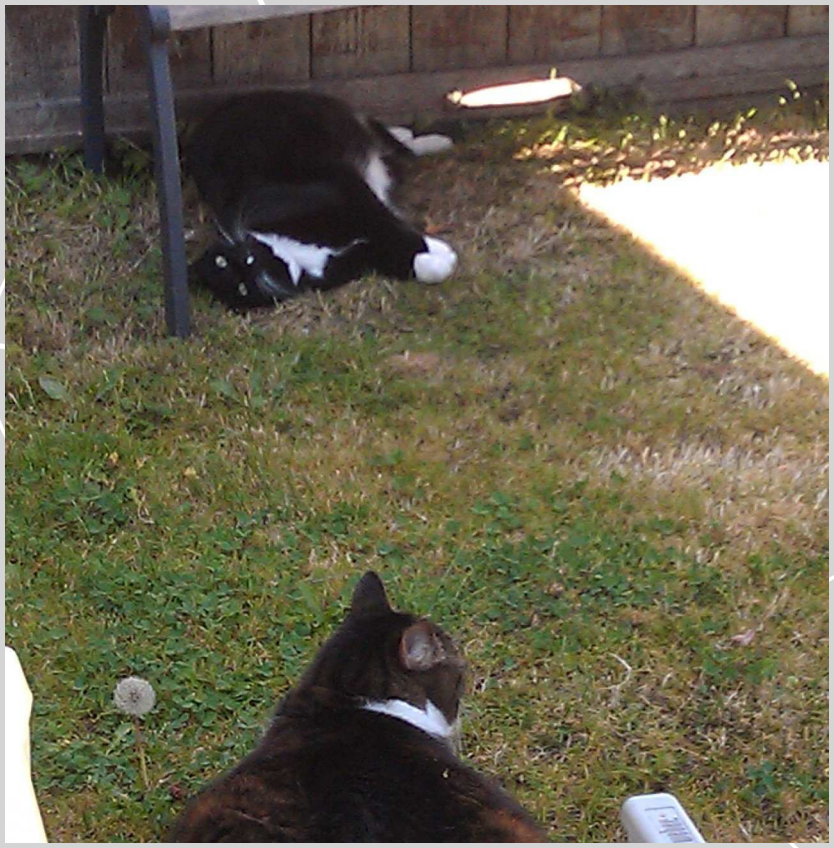


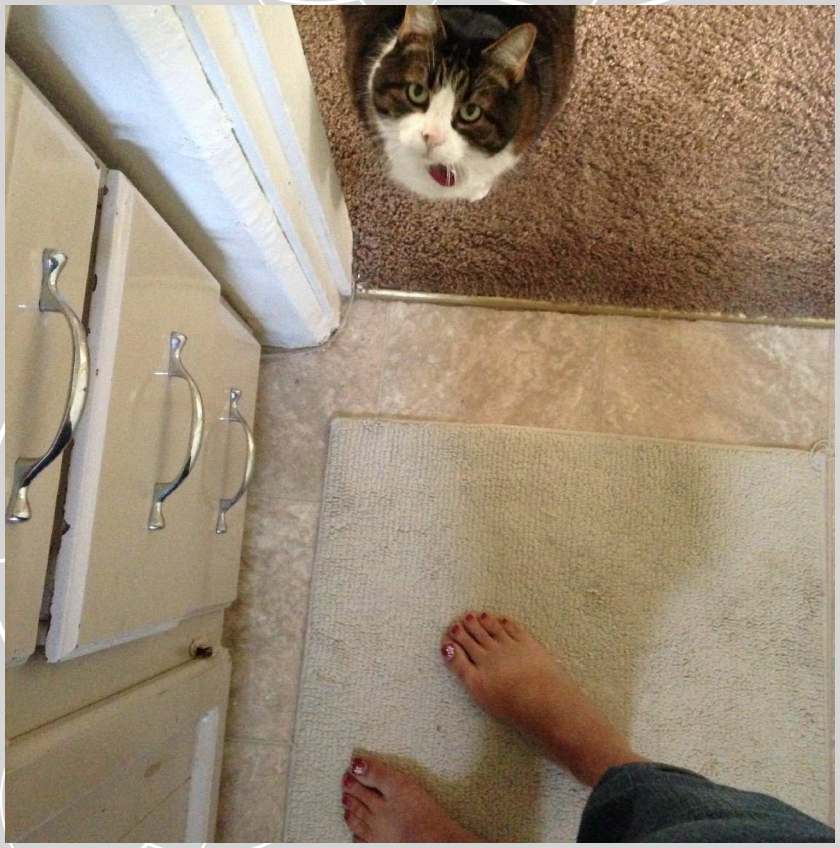
"Cats are connoisseurs of comfort."

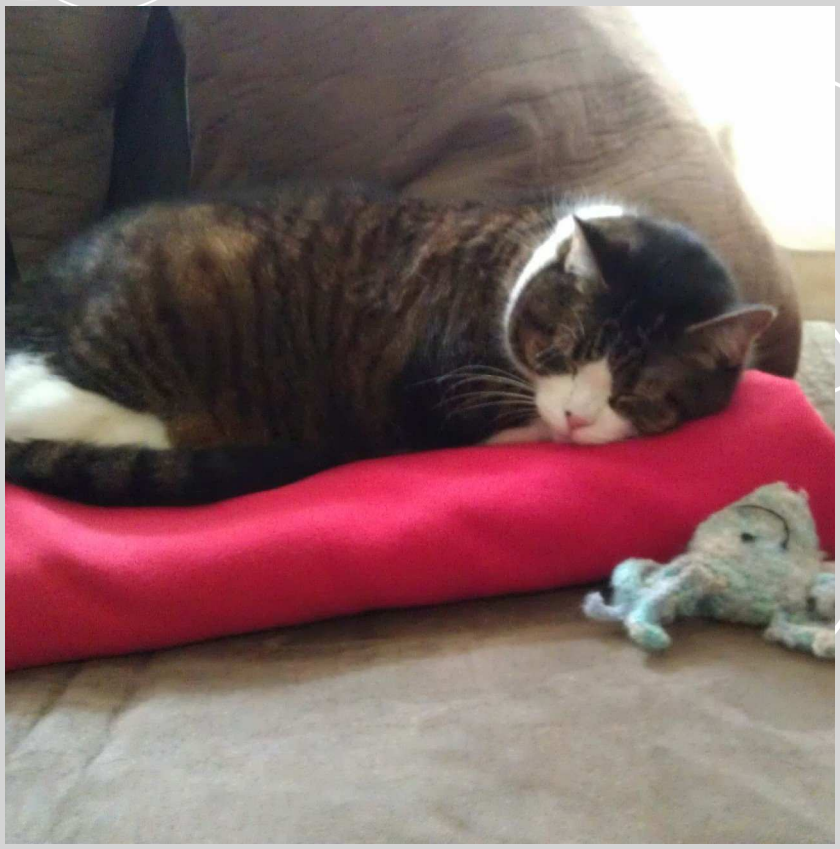
~ James Herriot, James Herriot's Cat Stories

Speck =^.^=

The Peabody Street House was blessed with a big, fully-fenced backyard. The cats were generally lined up at the door waiting to get outside in the mornings.

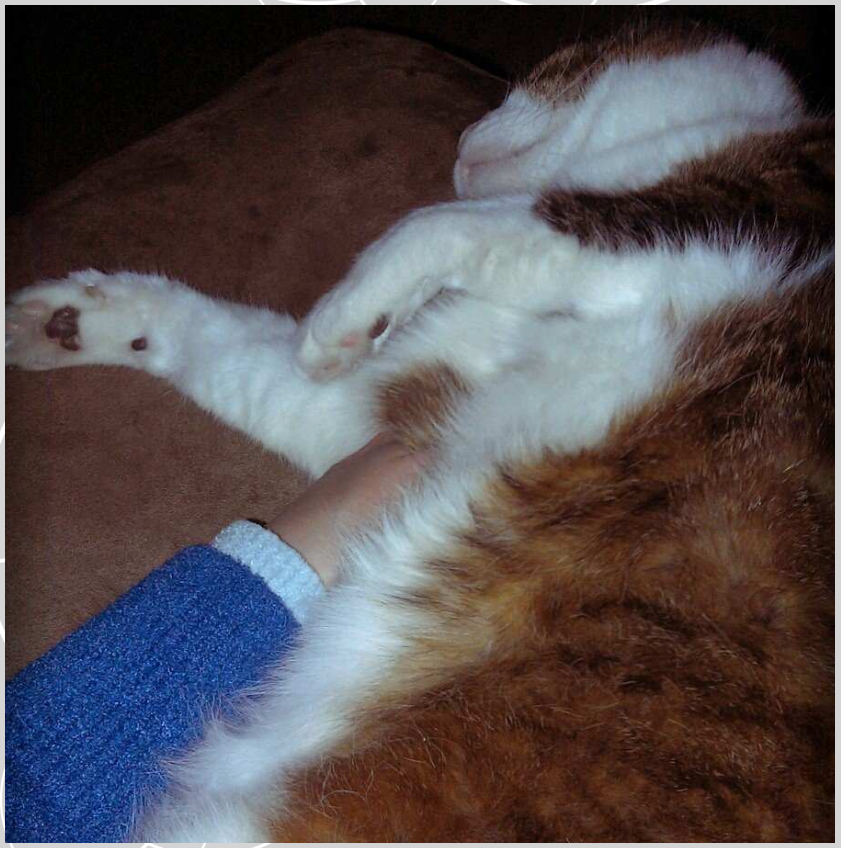


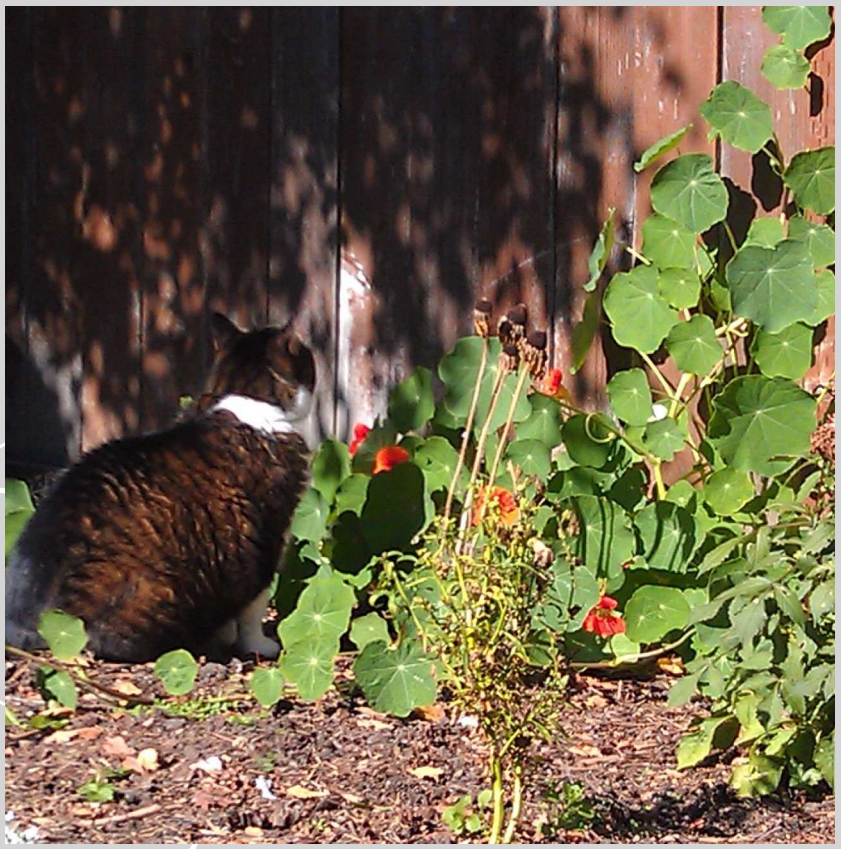


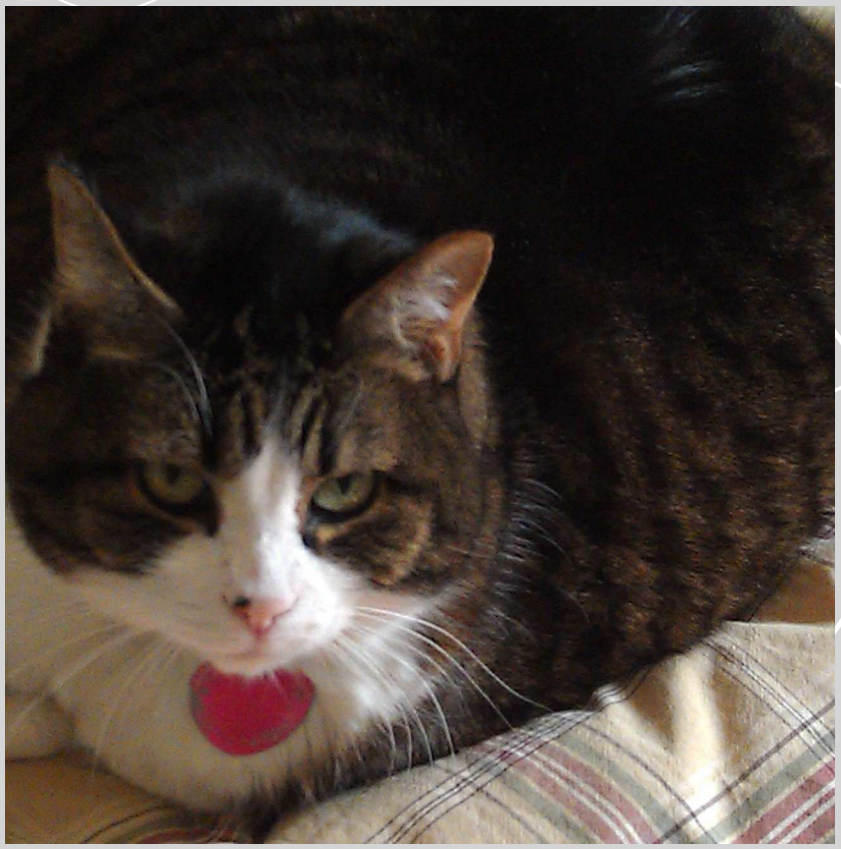


“A cat has absolute emotional honesty: human beings, for one reason or another, may hide their feelings, but a cat does not.”

~ Ernest Hemingway

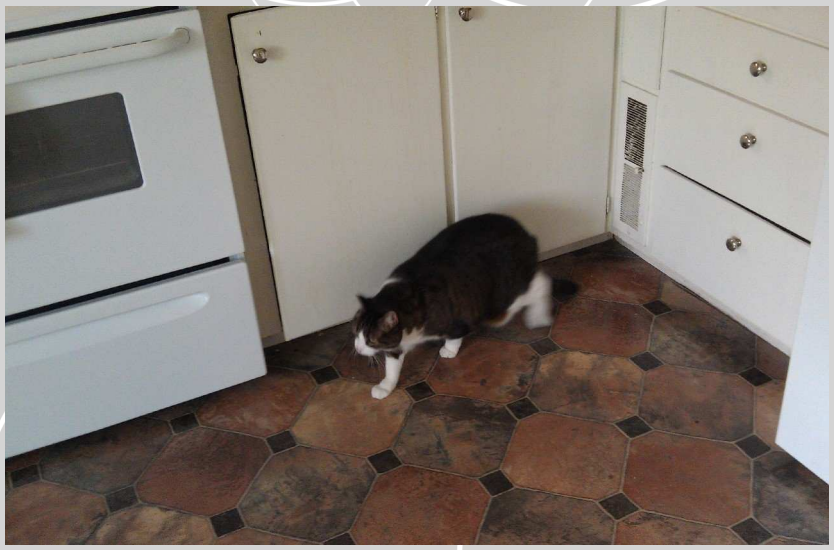


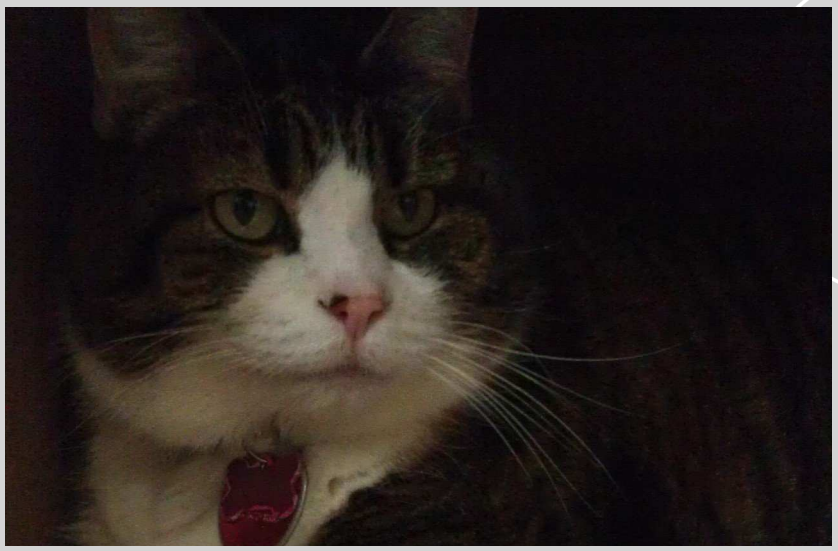


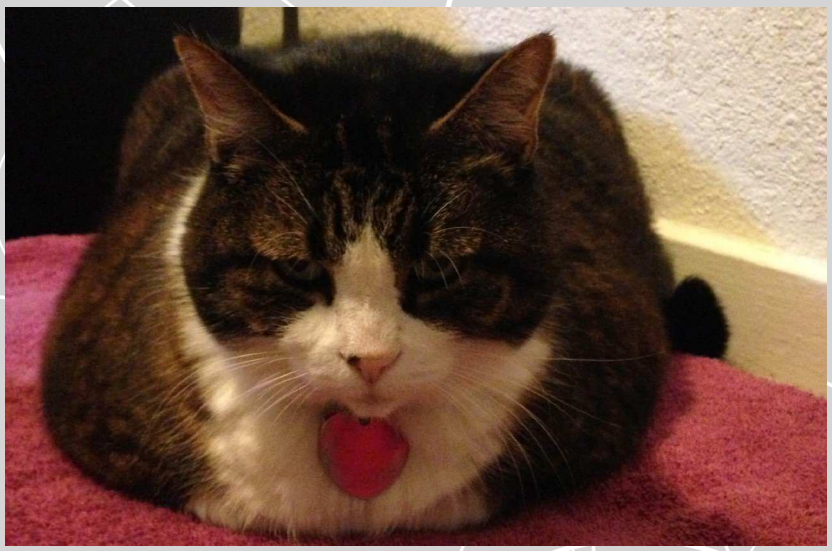


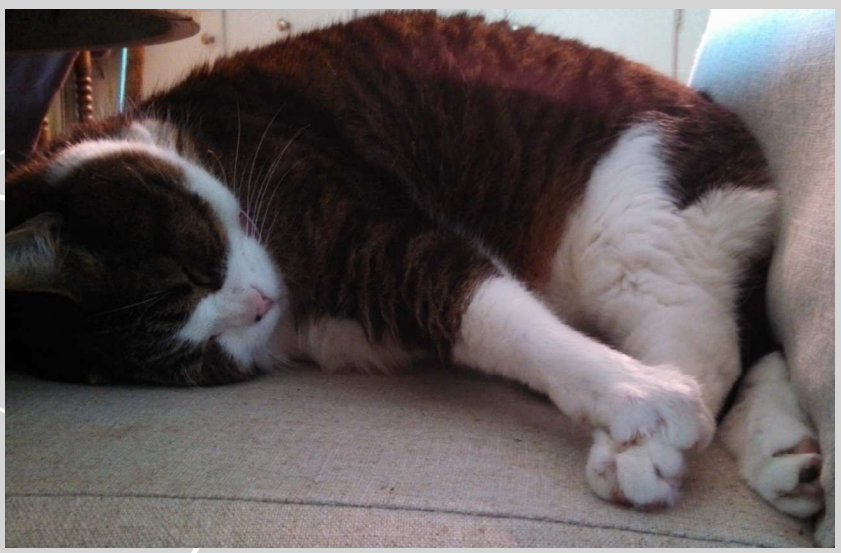
“Time spent with a cat is never wasted.”

~ Colette









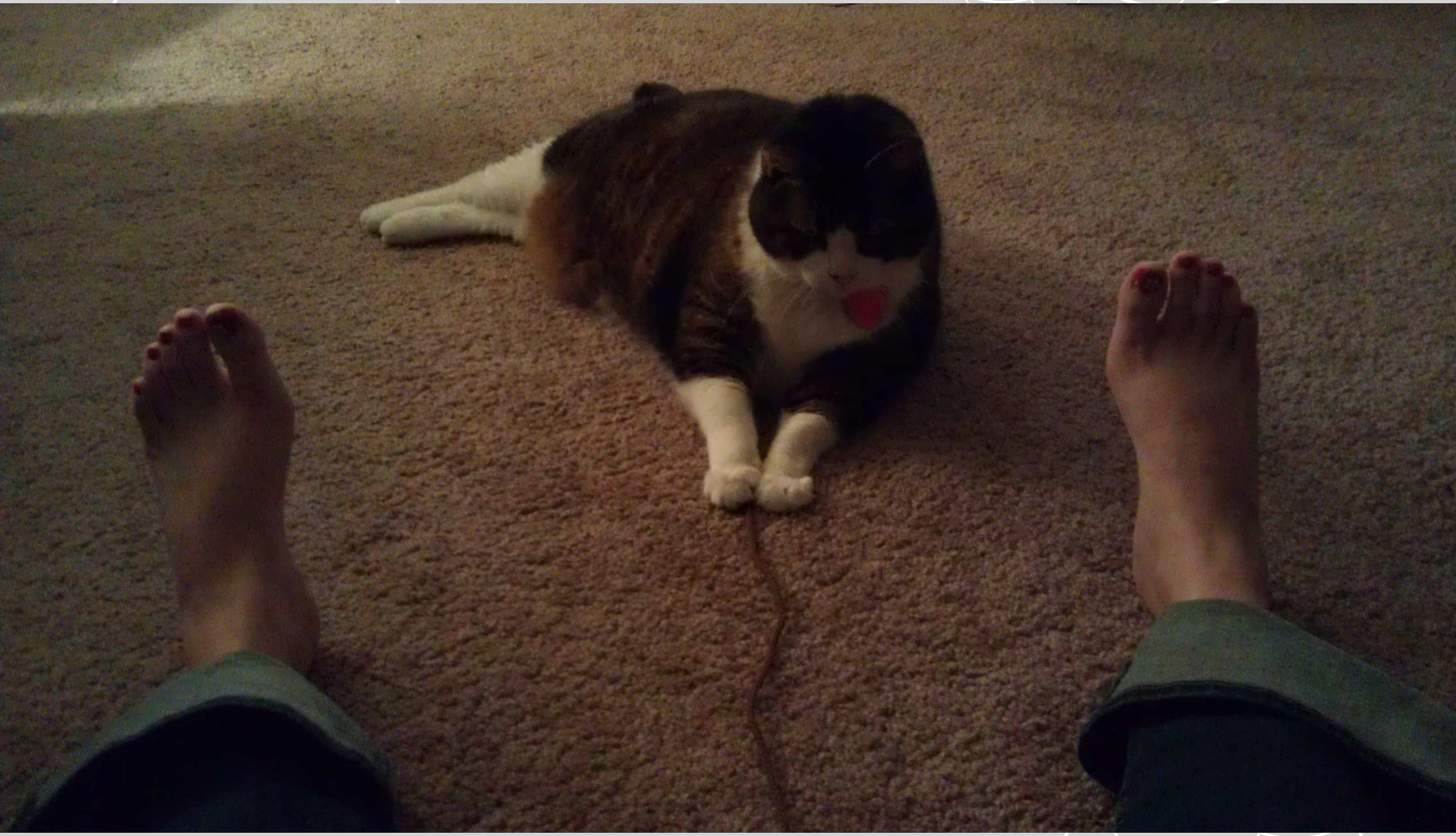
On July 15, 2013, Oliver and I were married by our friend, Walt Pritchard, at Rhythmwaters, a private property just outside of Langley on Whidbey Island. I surely wish that Speck could have attended, but I certainly knew we had her full support.

Above photograph by Dani Weiss
Non-cat photographs on the right page by Clint Bright

Speck =^.^=

"Who would believe such pleasure from a wee ball o' fur? "

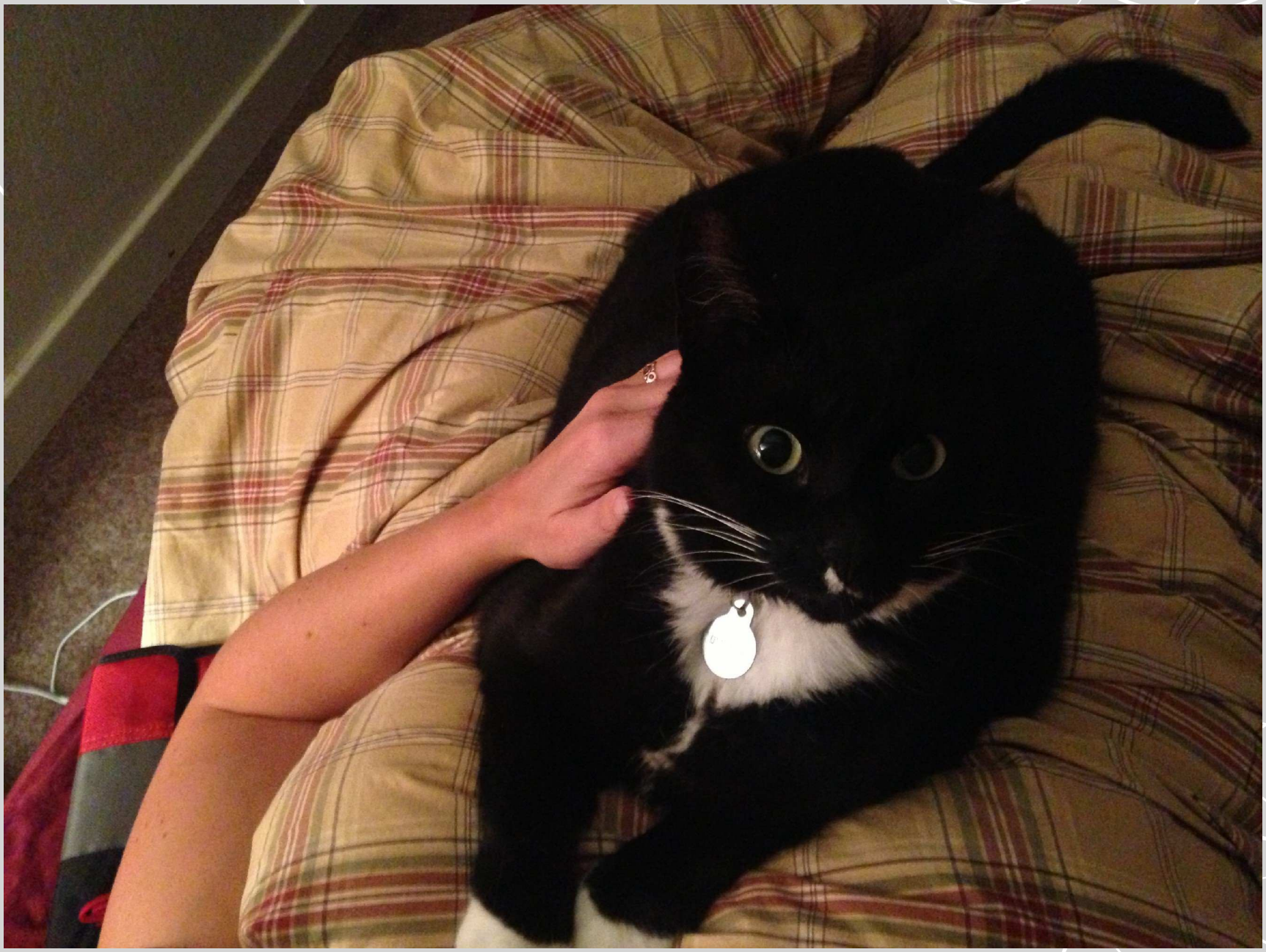
~ Irish Saying



“I love cats because I enjoy my home; and little by little, they become its visible soul.”

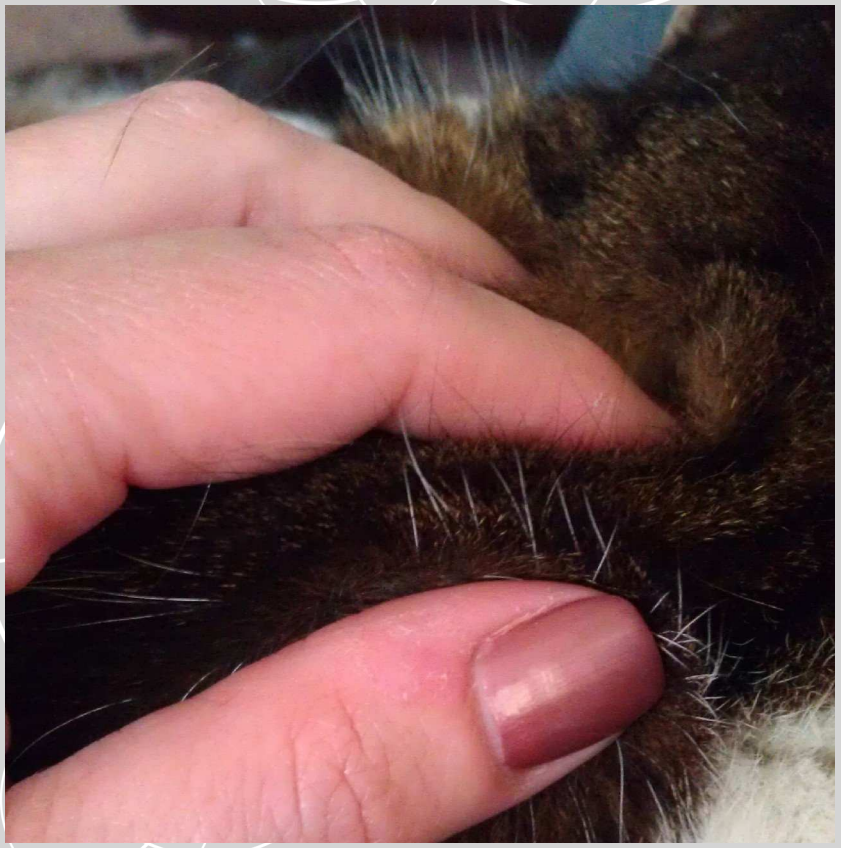
— Jean Cocteau

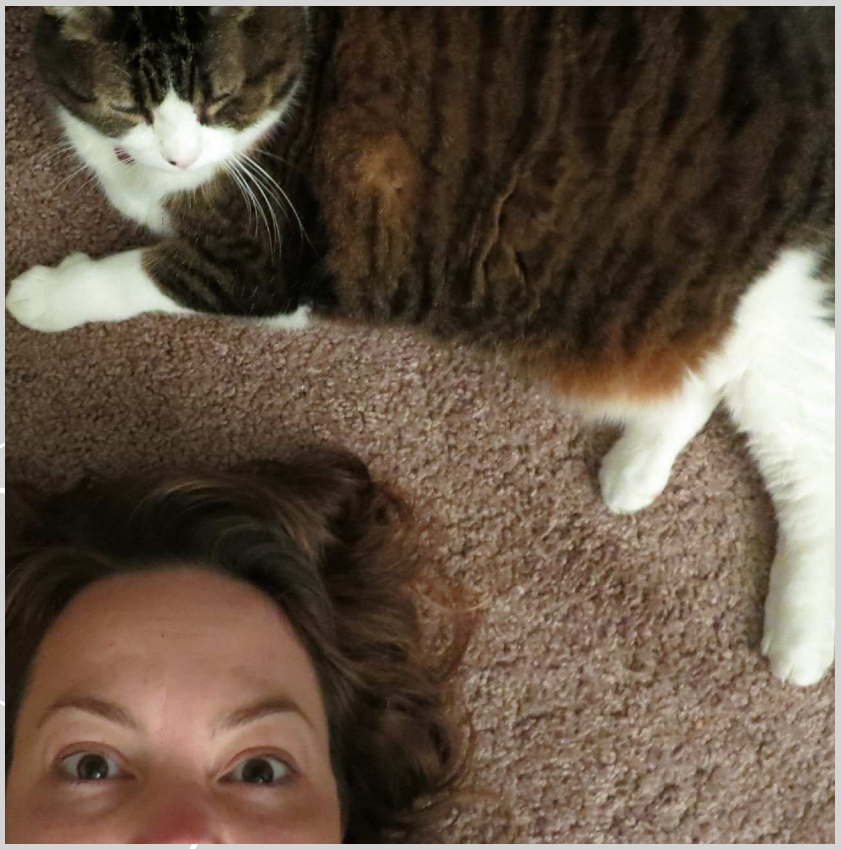
Speck =^.^=

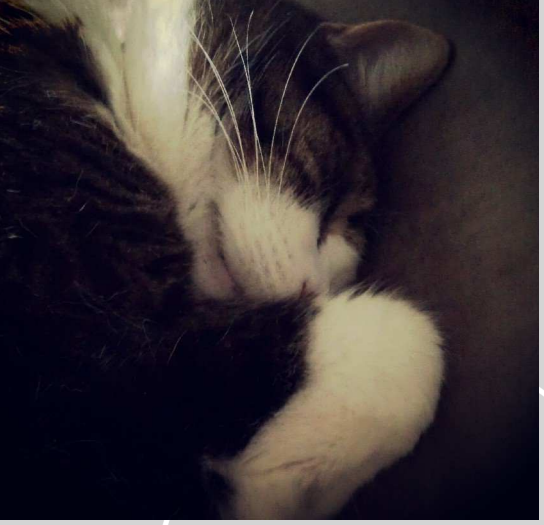


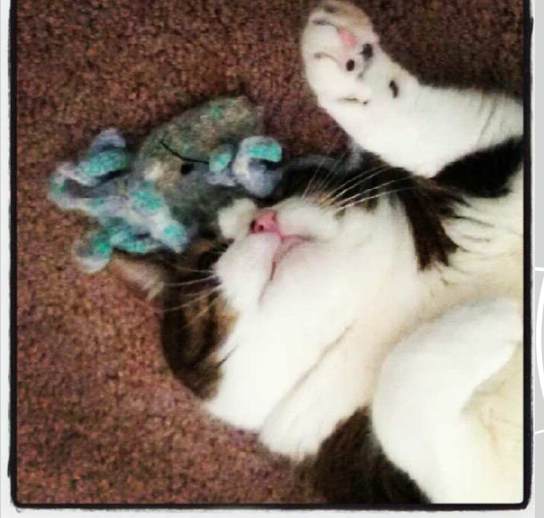
“Human beings are drawn to cats because they are all we are not —
self-contained, elegant in everything they do, relaxed, assured, glad of company, yet still possessing secret lives.”

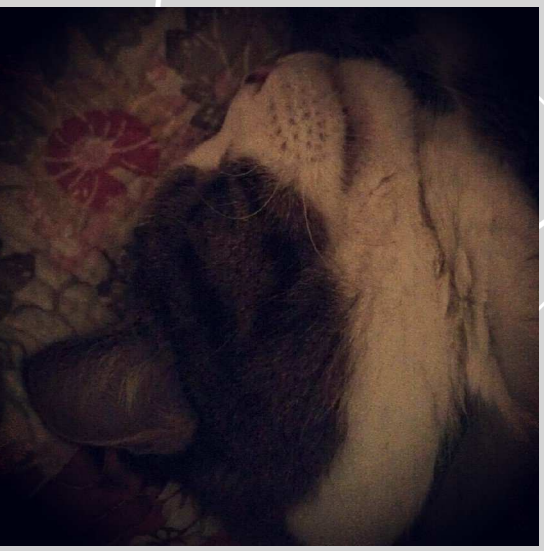
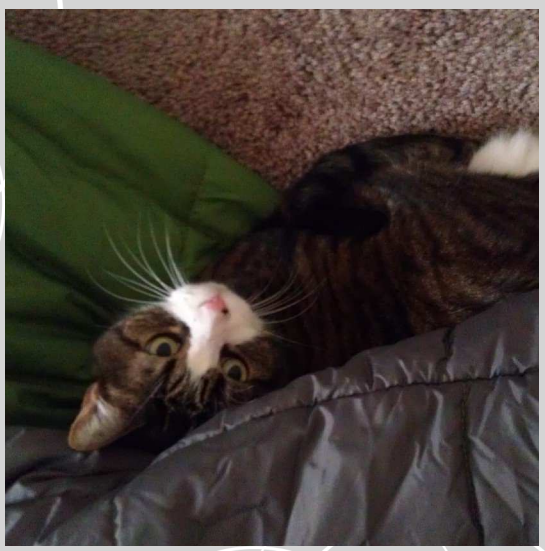
~ Pam Brown

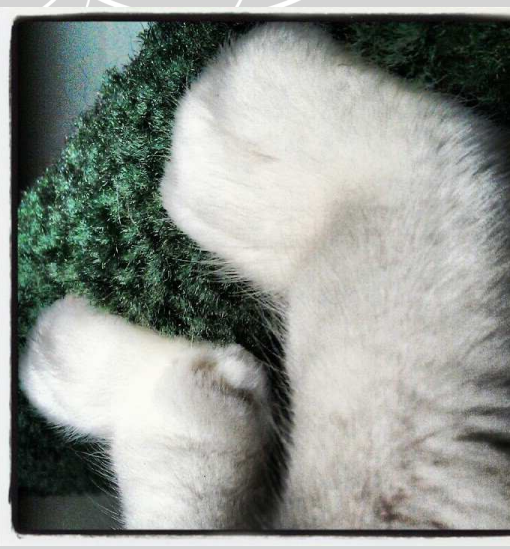
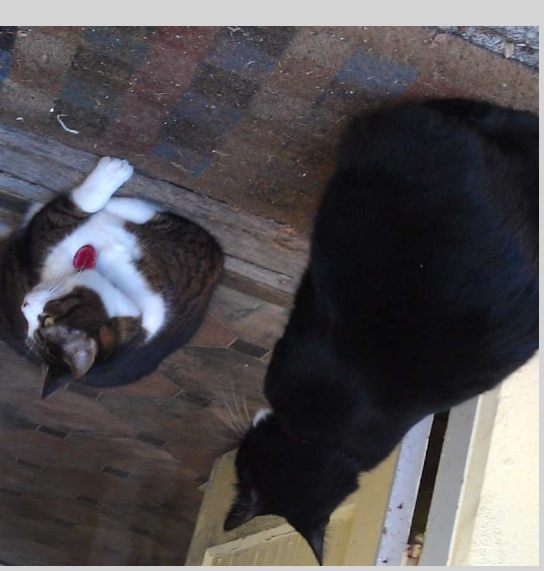
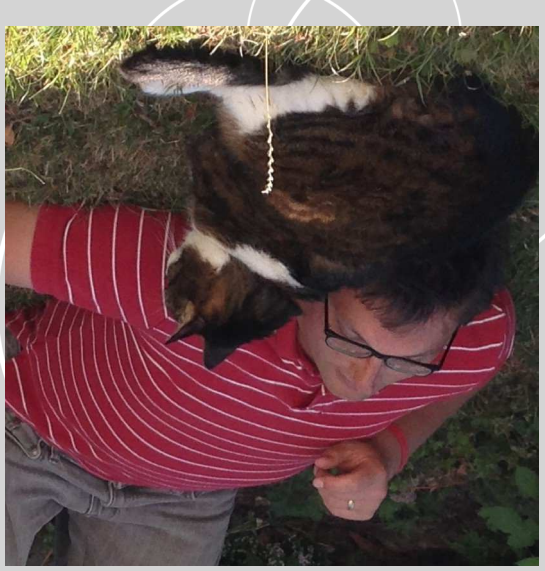
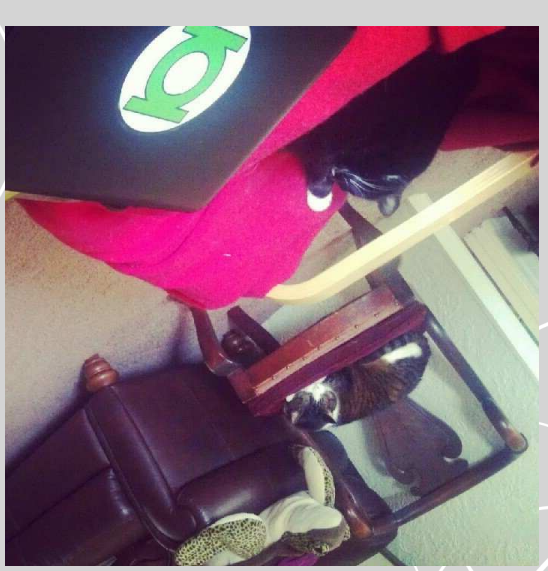
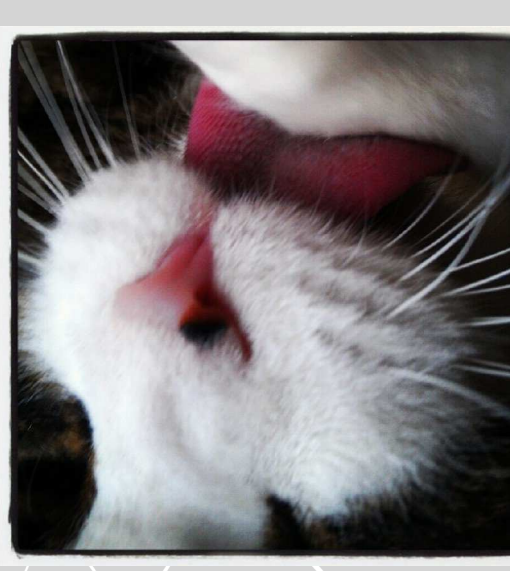
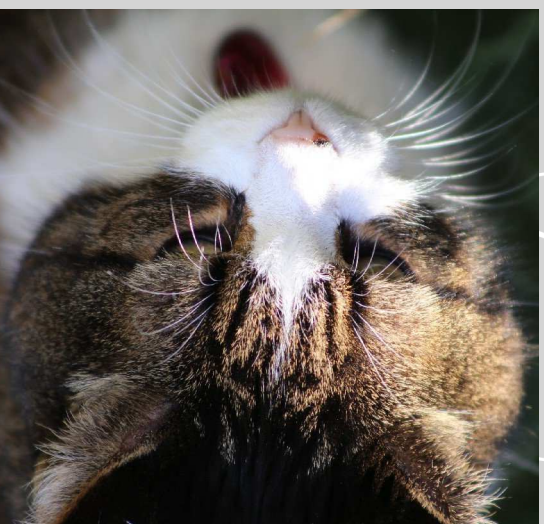


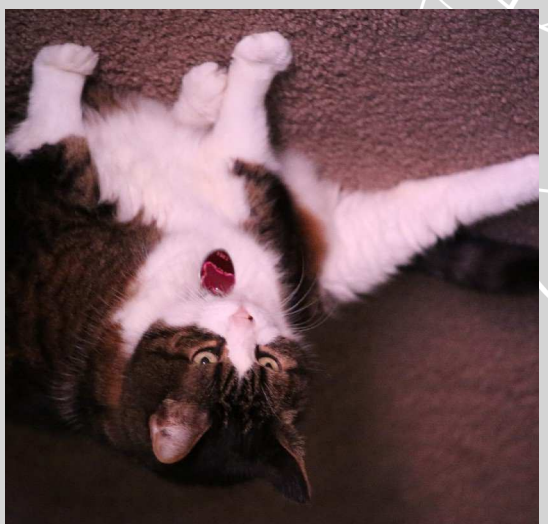
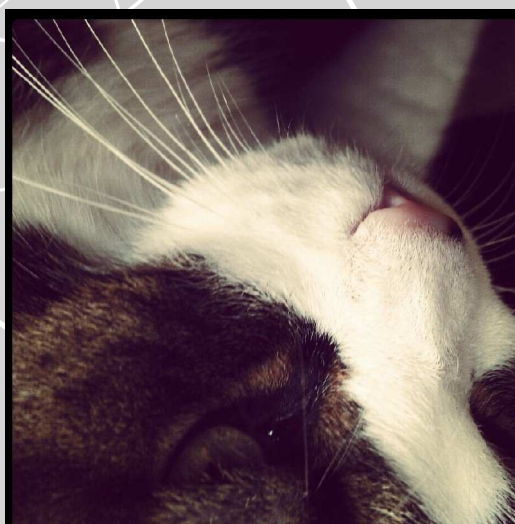


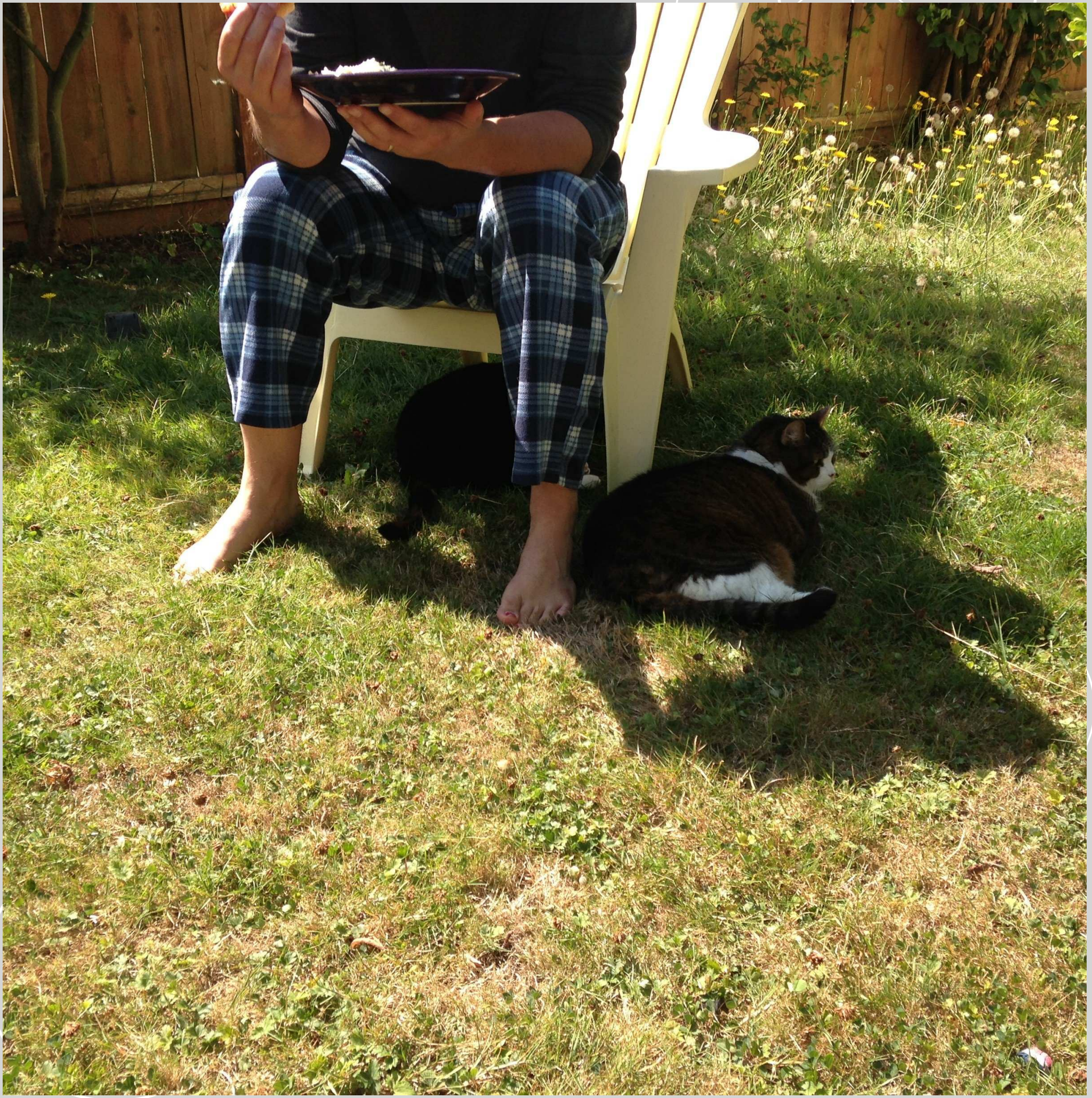


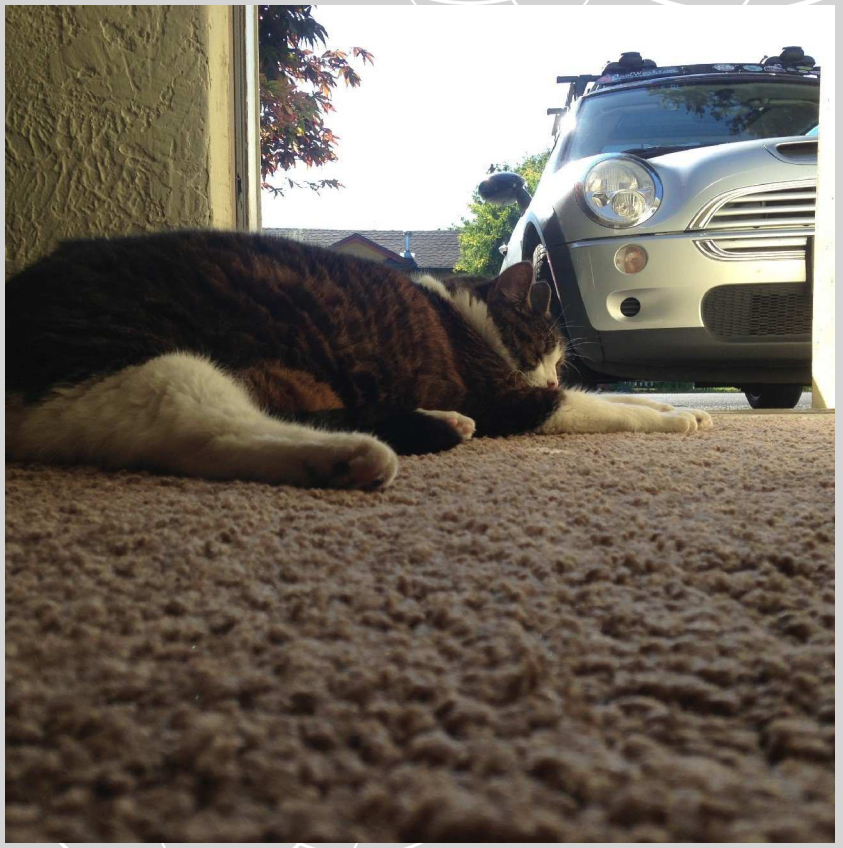


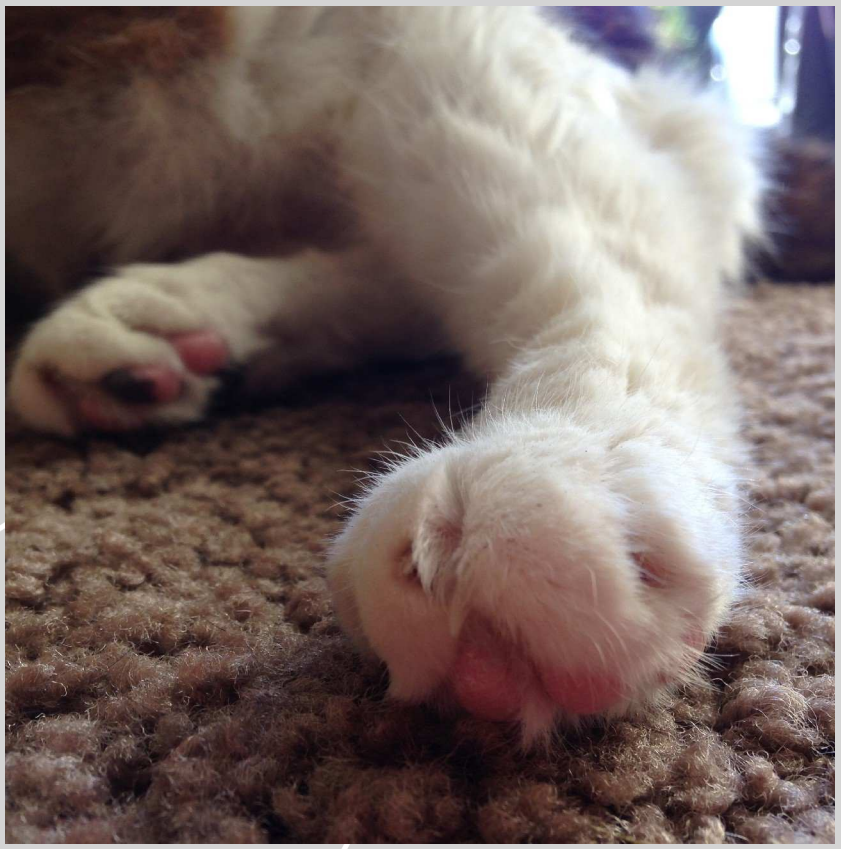



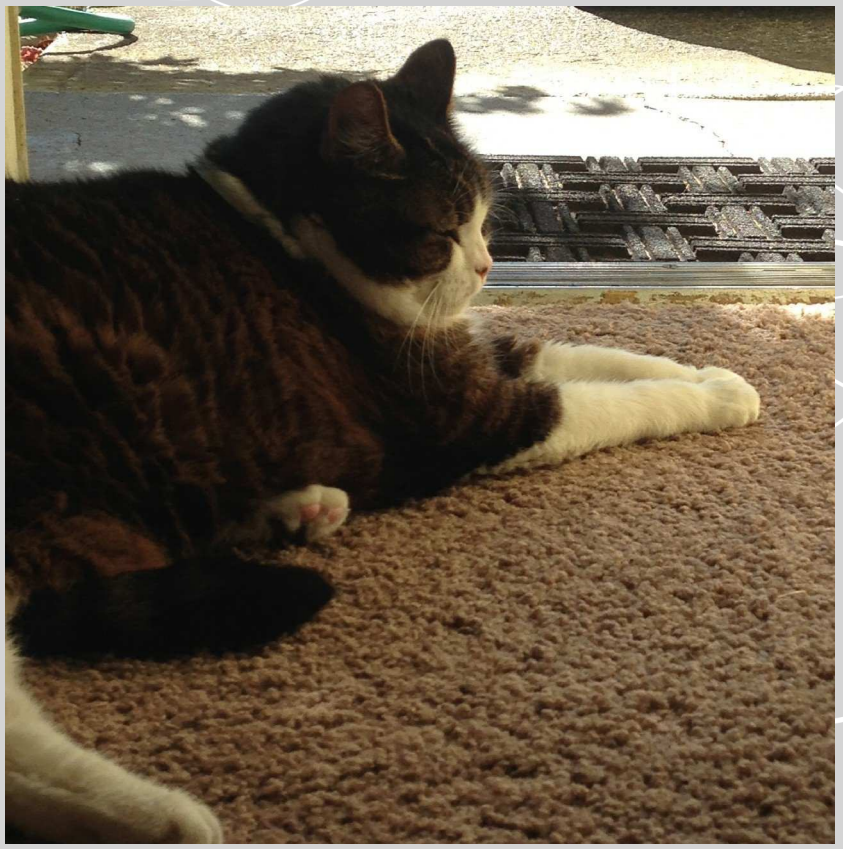







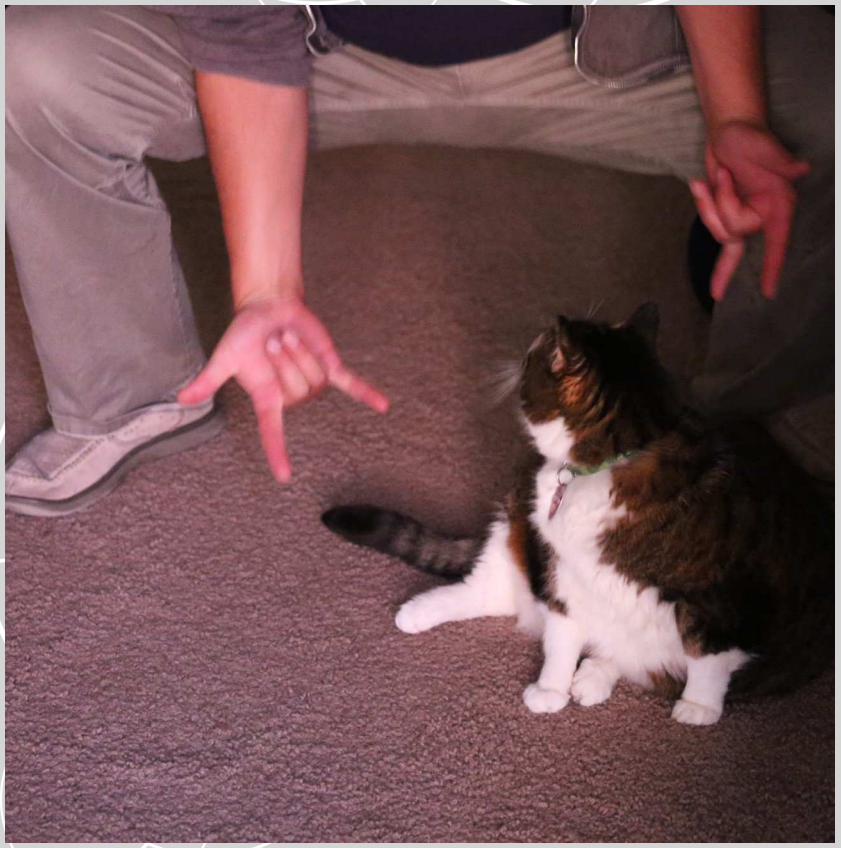



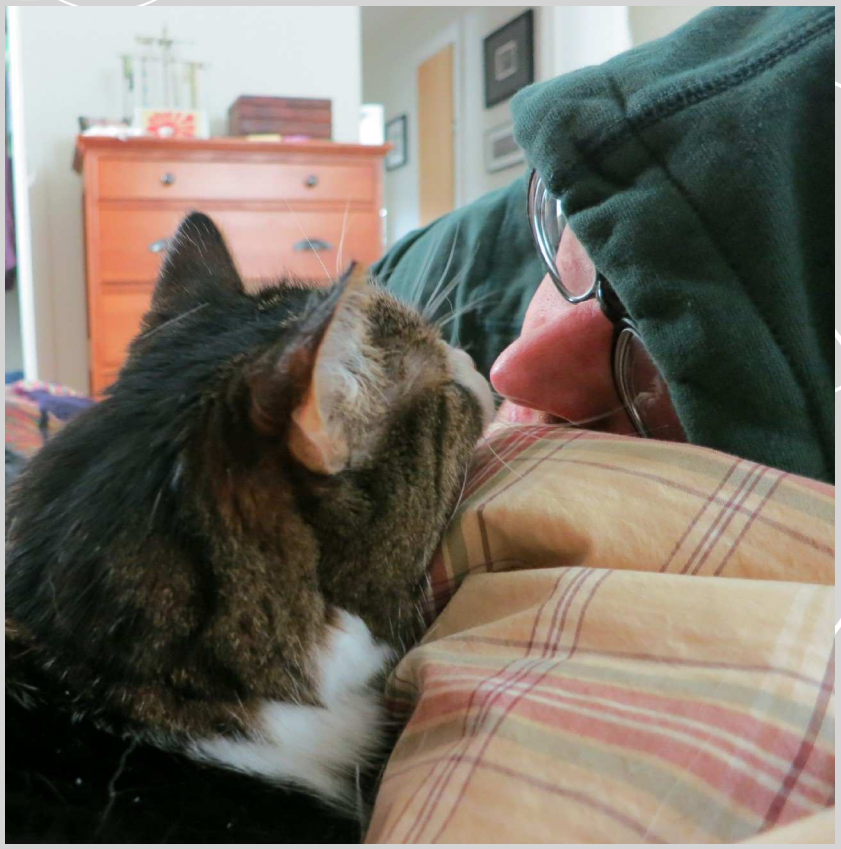


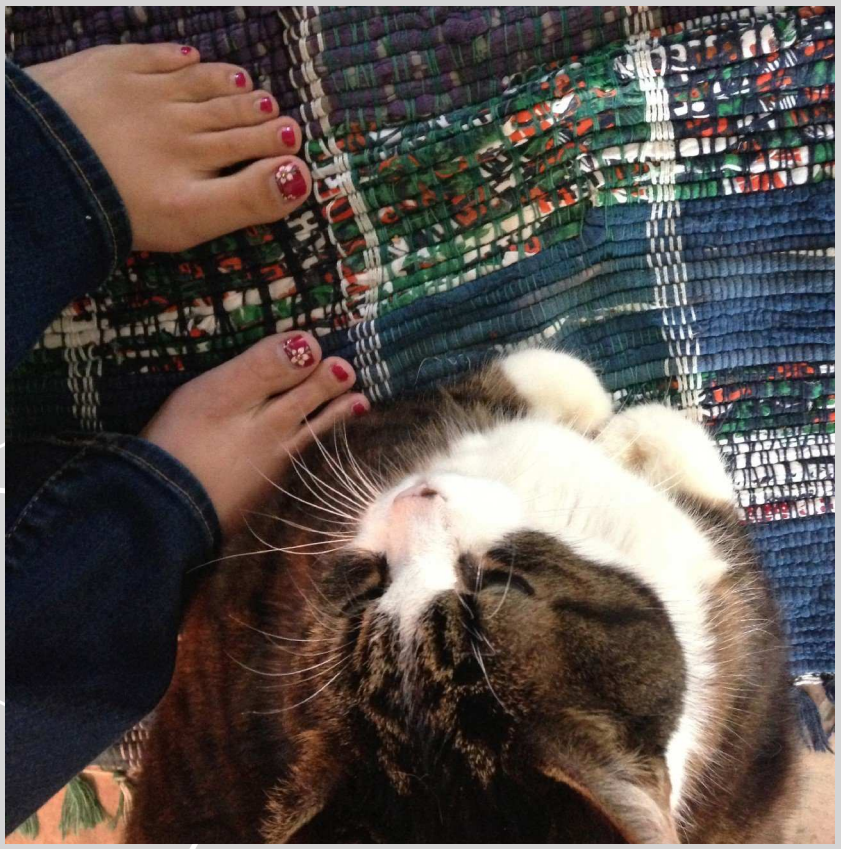


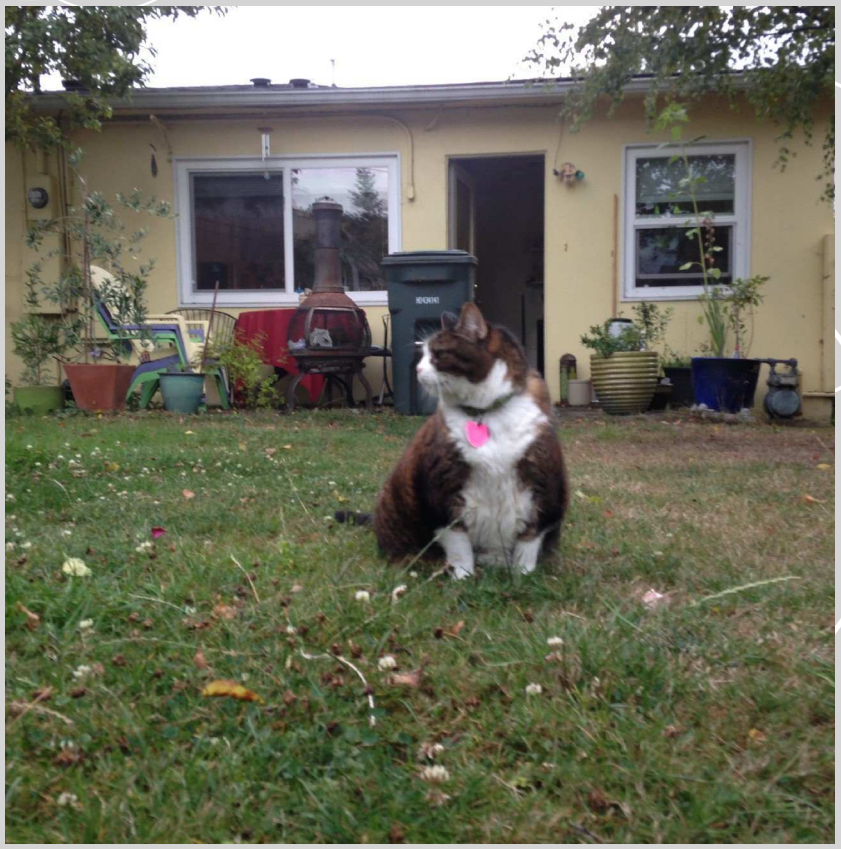










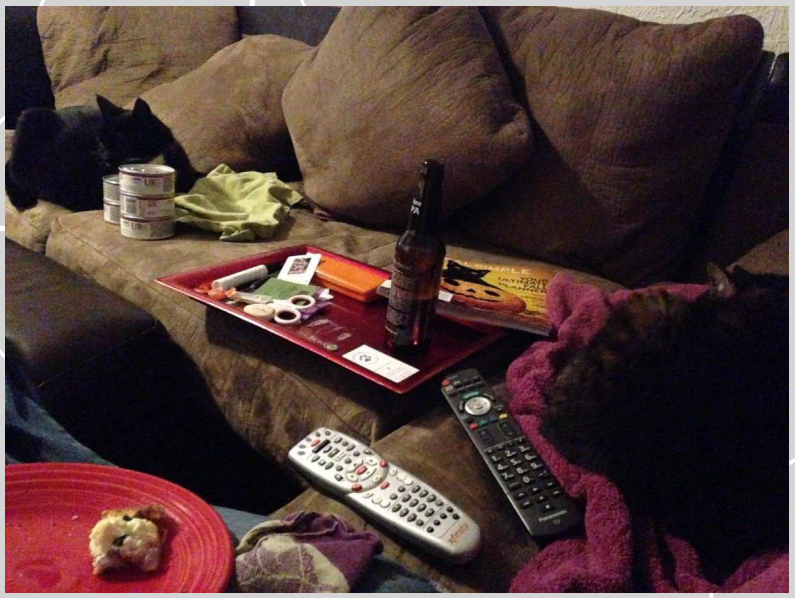


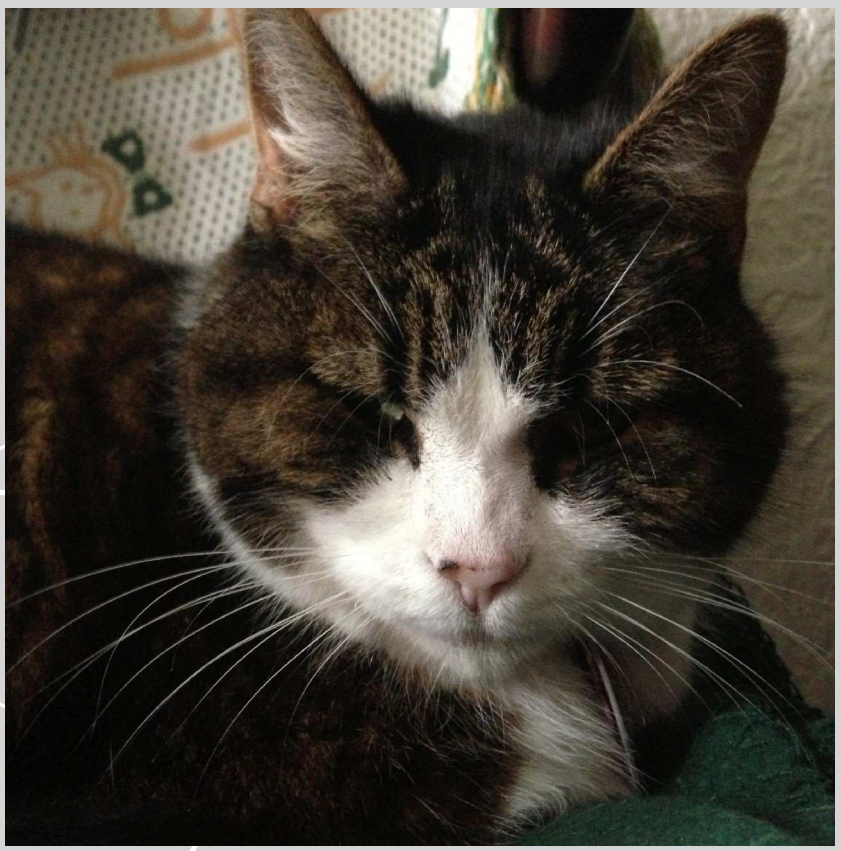
At the end of July, we took Speck to the vet in Bellingham for her annual exam, and to check on her recent inability to not truly clean herself because she was pretty chunky.

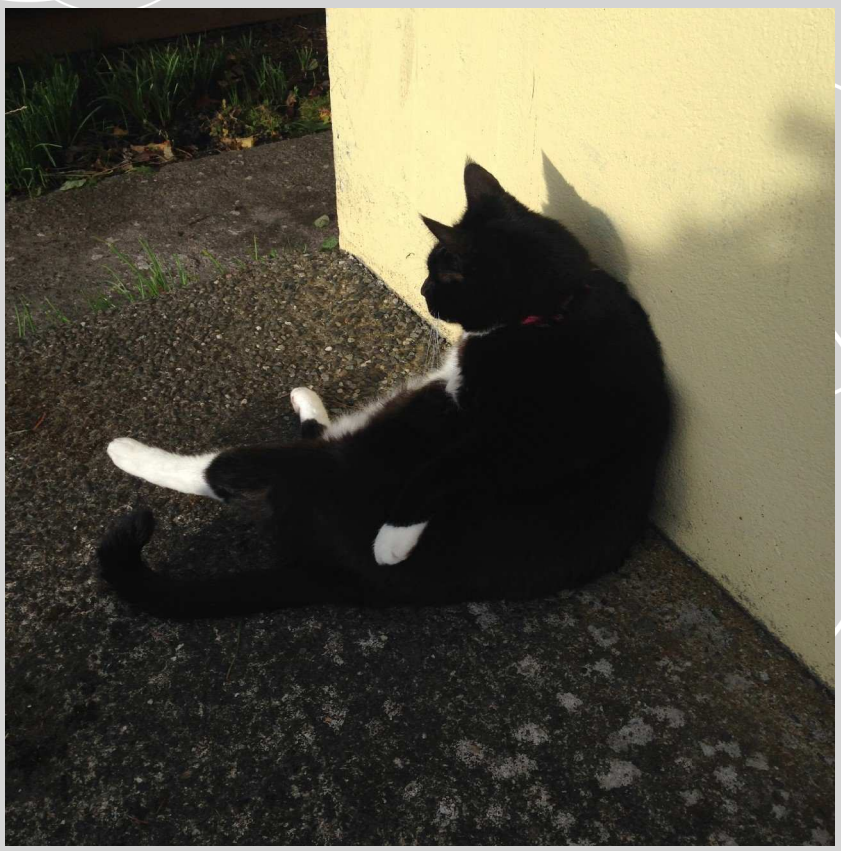
She always loved her food.

At this time, though, it truly had gone beyond a normal level. The vet weighed her in at 18 pounds, a record high. By the end of September, this would be a different story.

We started to call her the incredible shrinking cat. We attempted to cut back on her food, but it was more than that. Her desire for food was changing and decreasing.

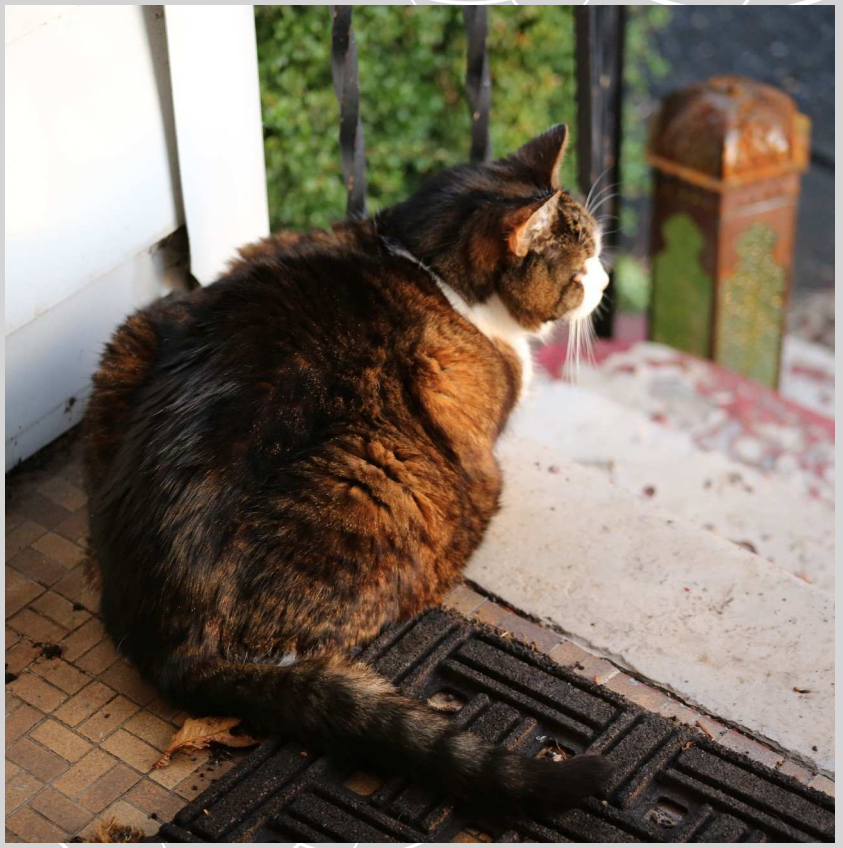






In September, we started to pack up the house, celebrated my 41st birthday, and got ready to move to Everett. With Speck still not well, we took her back to Northshore Veterinary Clinic and she had dropped 4 pounds, or 23% of her body weight. This was way unusual. They ran some tests and collected blood, and determined she had a urinary tract infection. We got some drugs to treat the UTI, but the pills were huge and it was hard to get her to her to take them. She was a trooper, as always, and a good patient too. Everyone always said what a beautiful cat she was.

Everett, Washington 2013



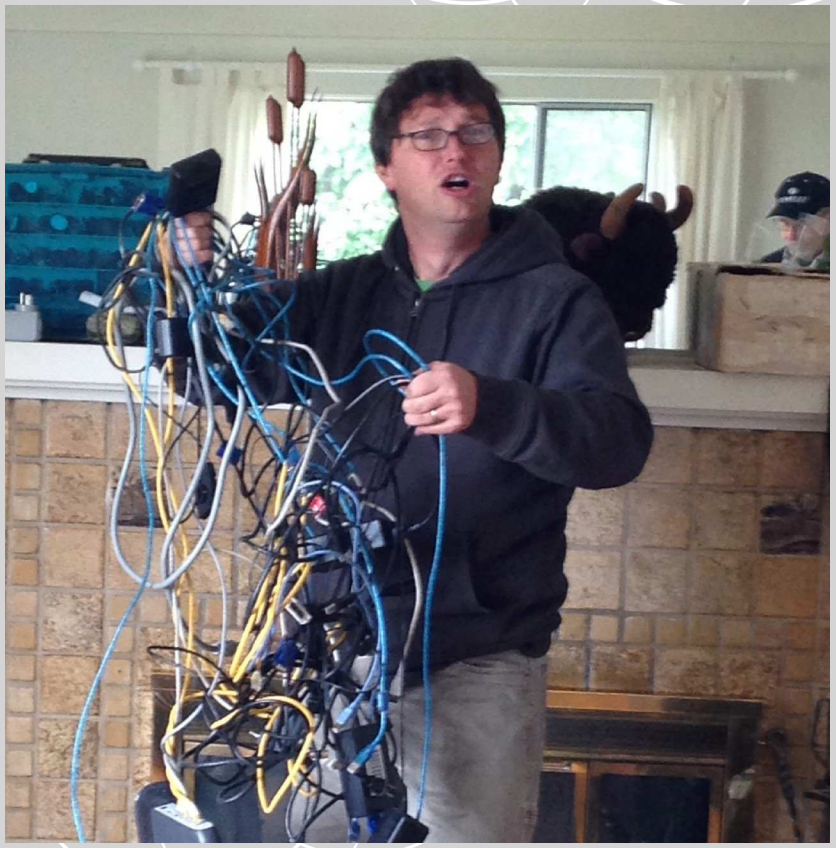
On the 27th September, two years to the day since Speck and I moved to Bellingham, Oliver and I rented a truck, and moved south into my childhood home at 1122 Grand Ave. My parents, Ralph and Ellen (Laaback) Quaas, bought the house in 1964 and when my mom died in 1994, I inherited it. It had been rented out since early 1995 and the most recent tenant, Mary Fears, was here from May 1997 to September 2013.

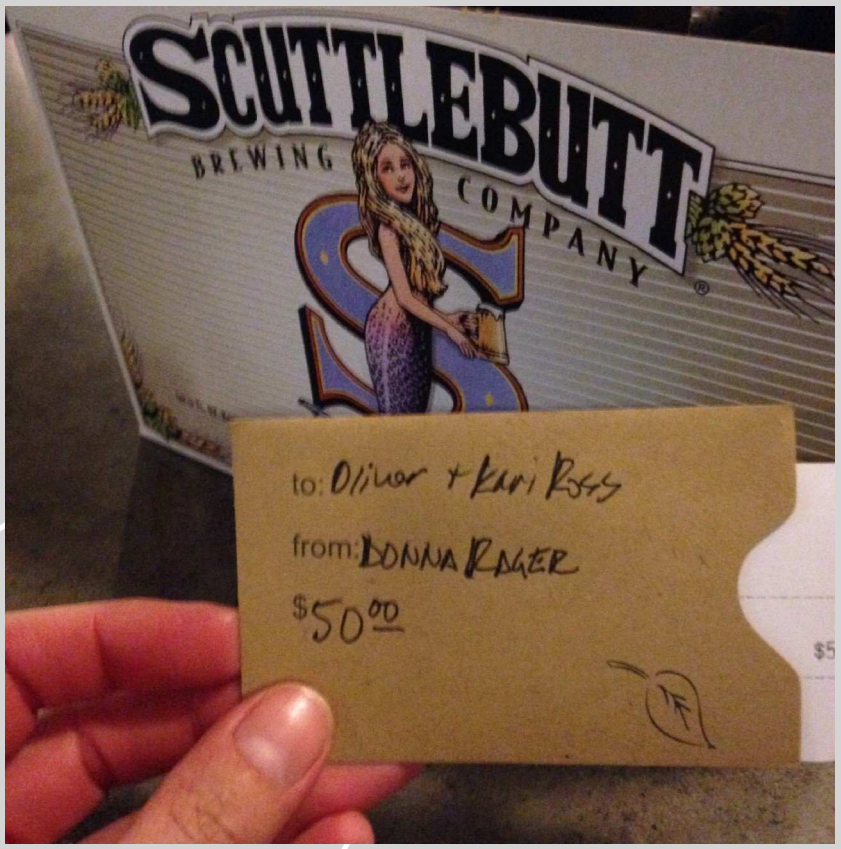
I remember promising to Speck that this would be it - the last move. She had been so flexible with the rest of the relocations, I was excited to finally have her home.

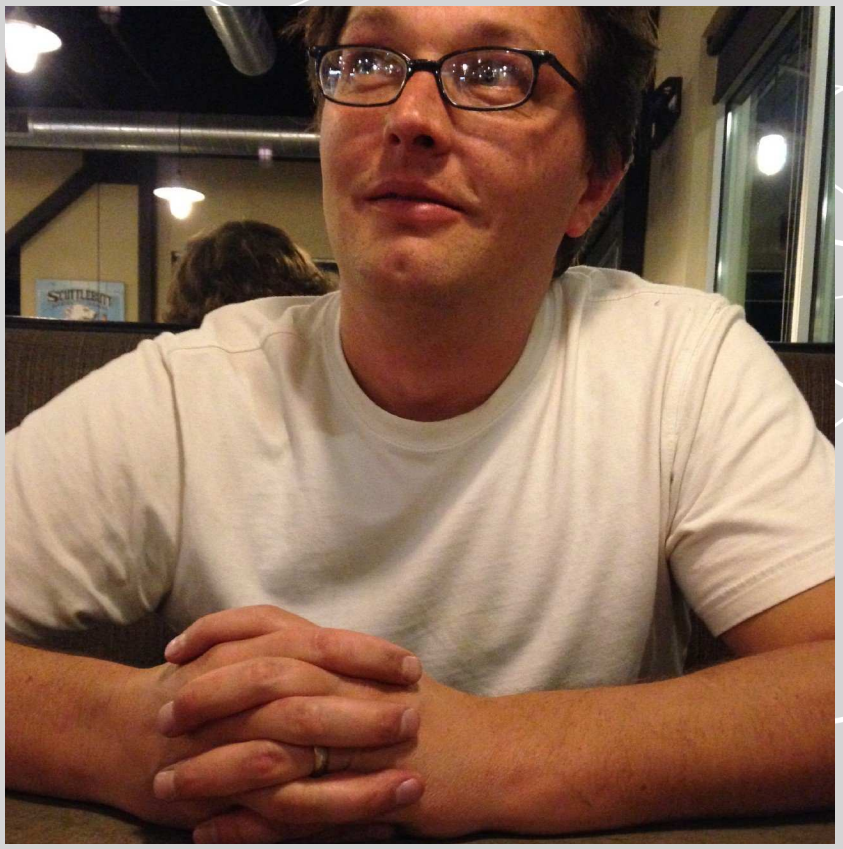
It did end up being her last home.

Panasonic
VIERA

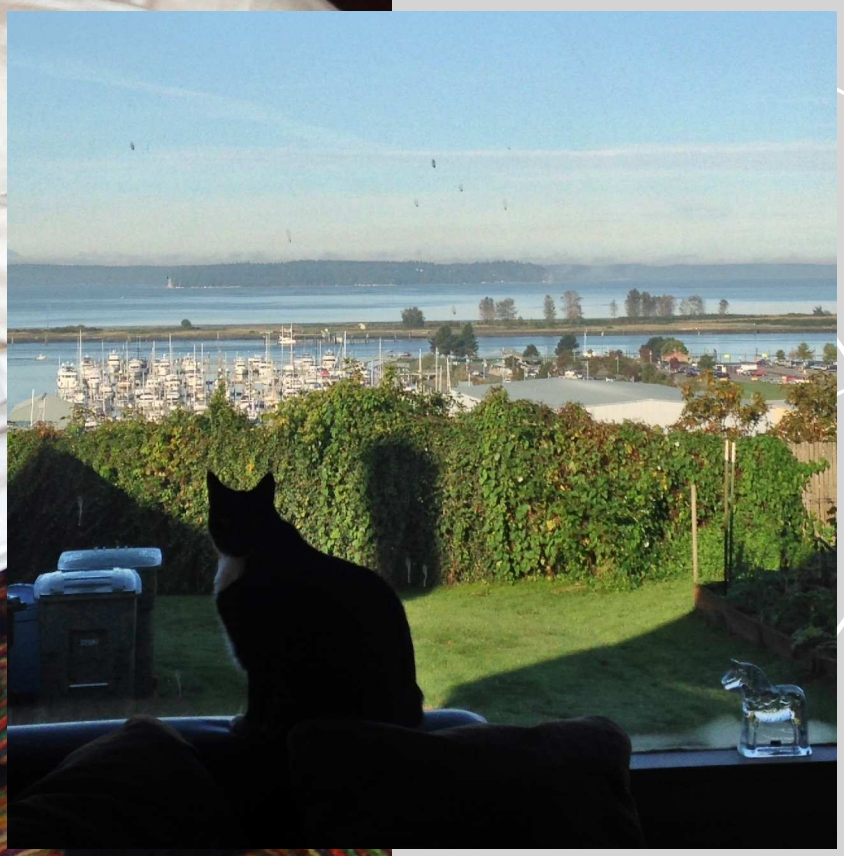
U-HAUL
U-HAUL
ONE-WAY & IN-TOWN MOVES
Gentle-Ride Van
1122

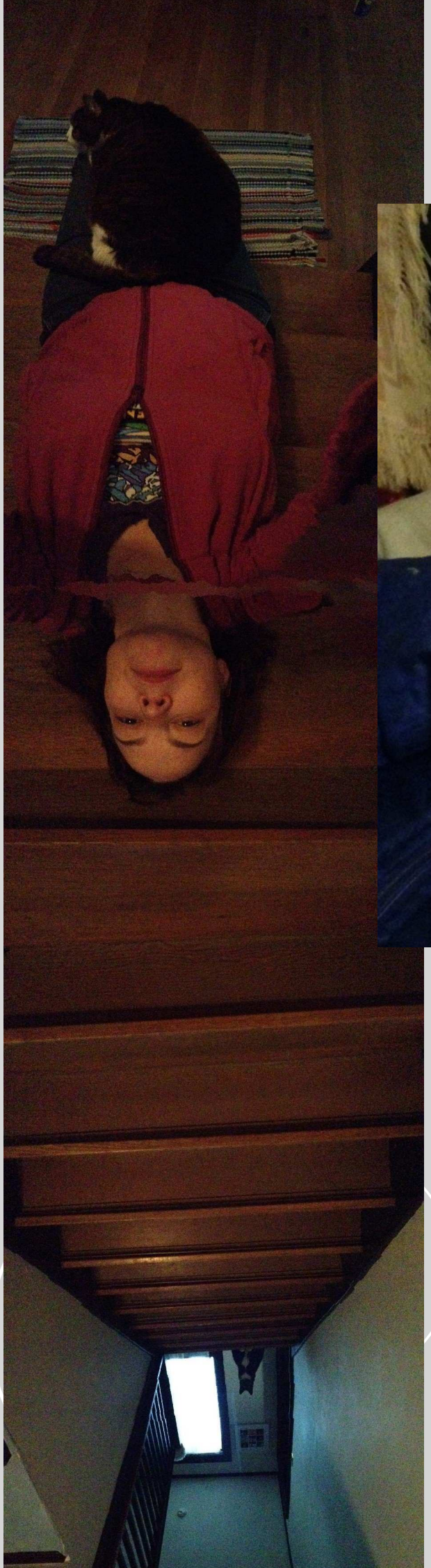


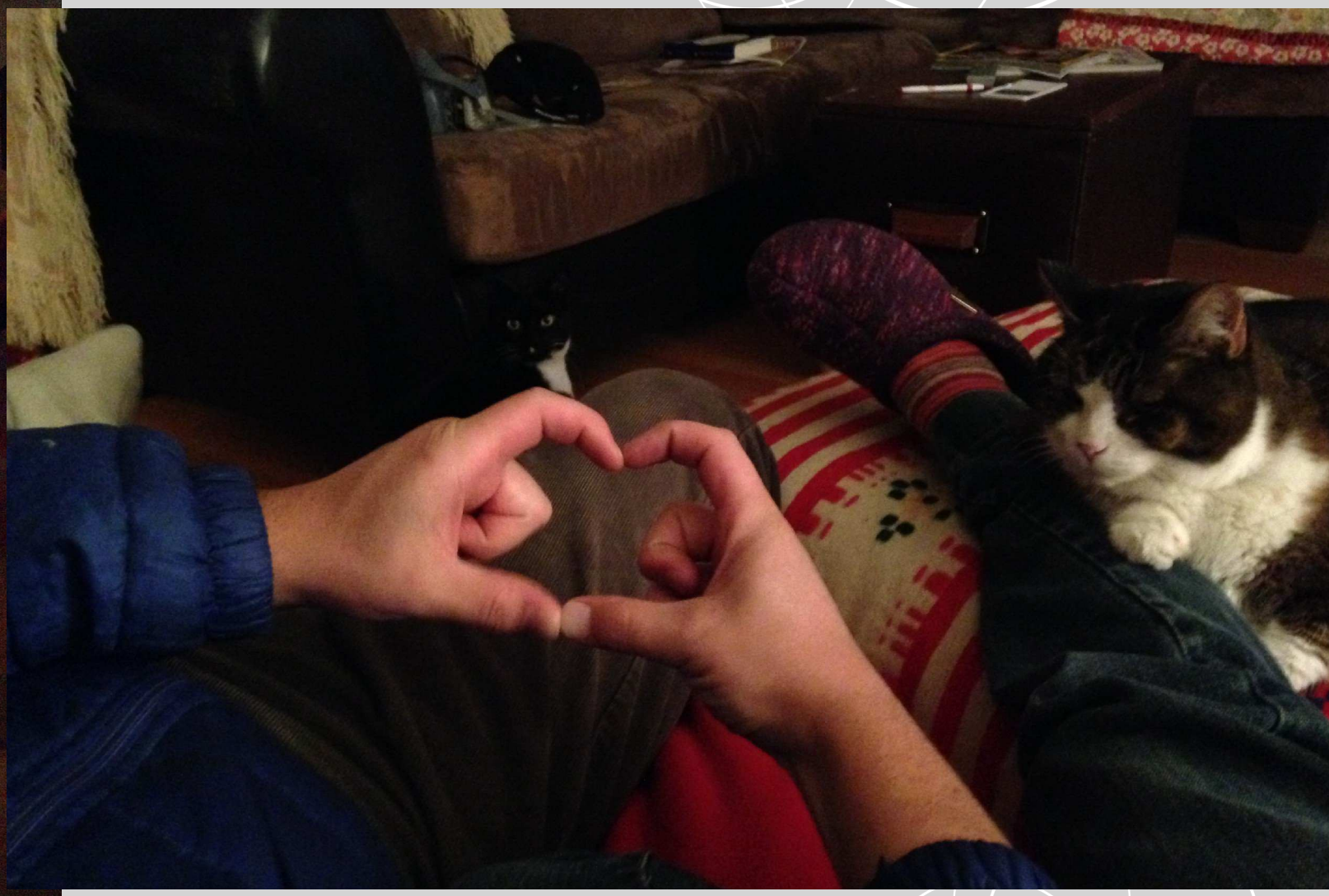

SCUTTLEBUTT
BREWING COMPANY
to: Oliver + Kari Ross
from: DONNA RAGER
$50.00



TOTEM
FAMILY DINING SINCE '53
IF BACON WERE ADDICTIVE
I WOULD PROBABLY OD
OPEN WED/SAT TILL 8PM







“Holding this soft, small living creature in my lap this way, though, and seeing how it slept with complete trust in me, I felt a warm rush in my chest. I put my hand on the cat's chest and felt his heart beating. The pulse was faint and fast, but his heart, like mine, was ticking off the time allotted to his small body with all the restless earnestness of my own.”

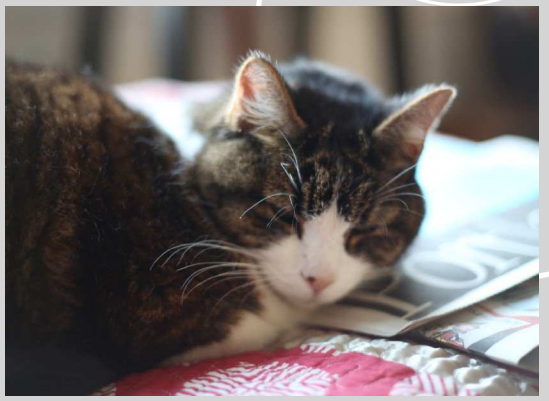
~ Haruki Murakami, The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle

"Life and death are of supreme importance. Time swiftly passes by and opportunity is lost. Each of us should strive to awaken. Awaken. Take heed, do not squander your life."

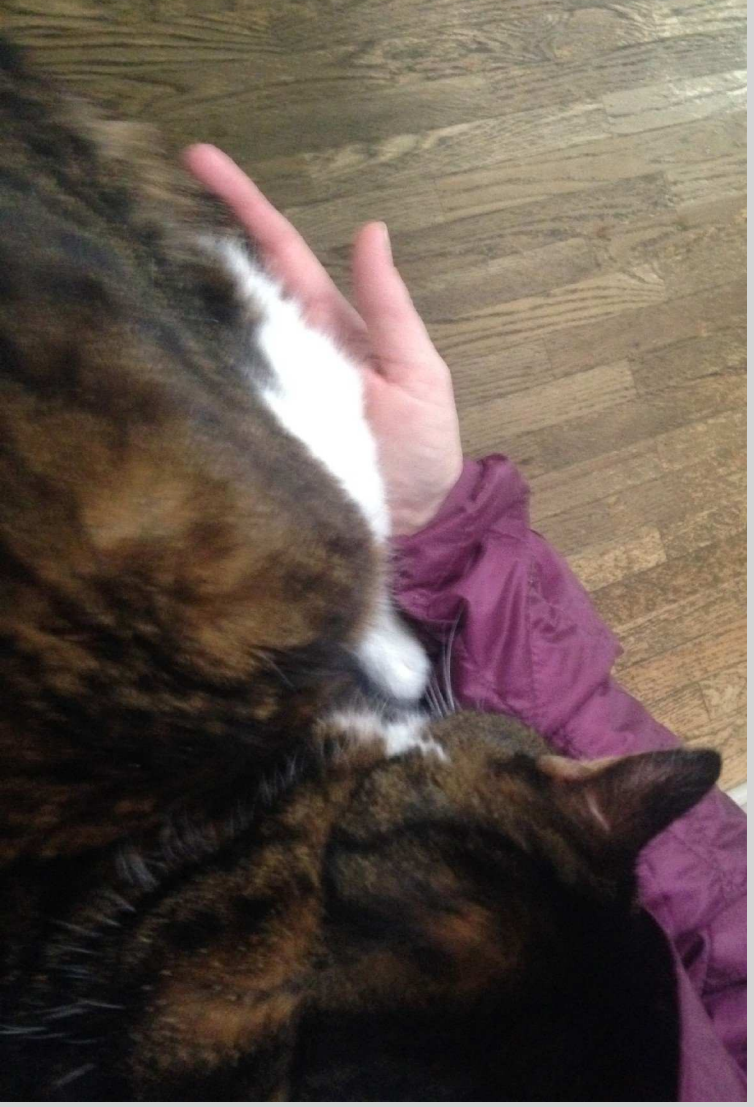
~ Dogen Zenji

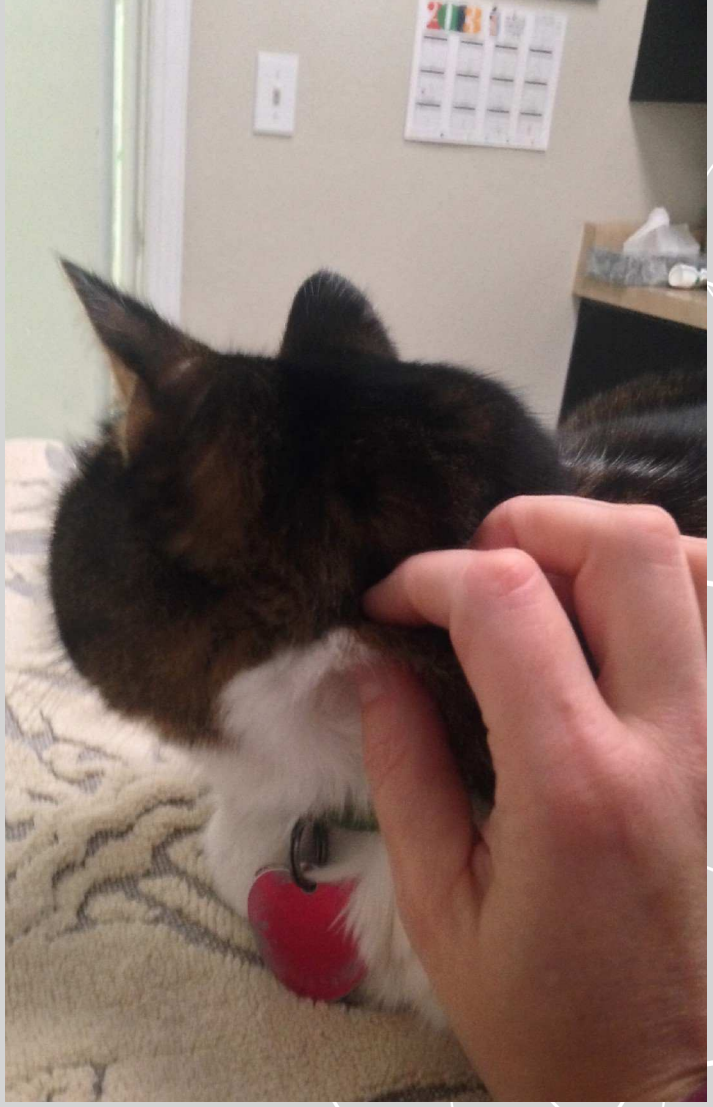
Shortly after moving in to the Everett house, I had my annual trip to Alaska for the ATIA conference. Before and after, Speck was like glue to my lap. This increased as the month went on and I happily gave her as much still time as I could. It really is a privilege to have an animal trust me so, and desire time with me or Oliver above all else.

We still didn't have a definitive reason for her weight loss at this point and had taken her back to her favorite vet and friend, Karen Konz-Hofmann, at Maple Leaf Pet Corner in Seattle. They took our worries seriously and did some more tests. We resolved the UTI, but now she wasn't keeping food or the medication down as easily, and we put her on a food stimulant and anti-nausea medication. It sort of worked.

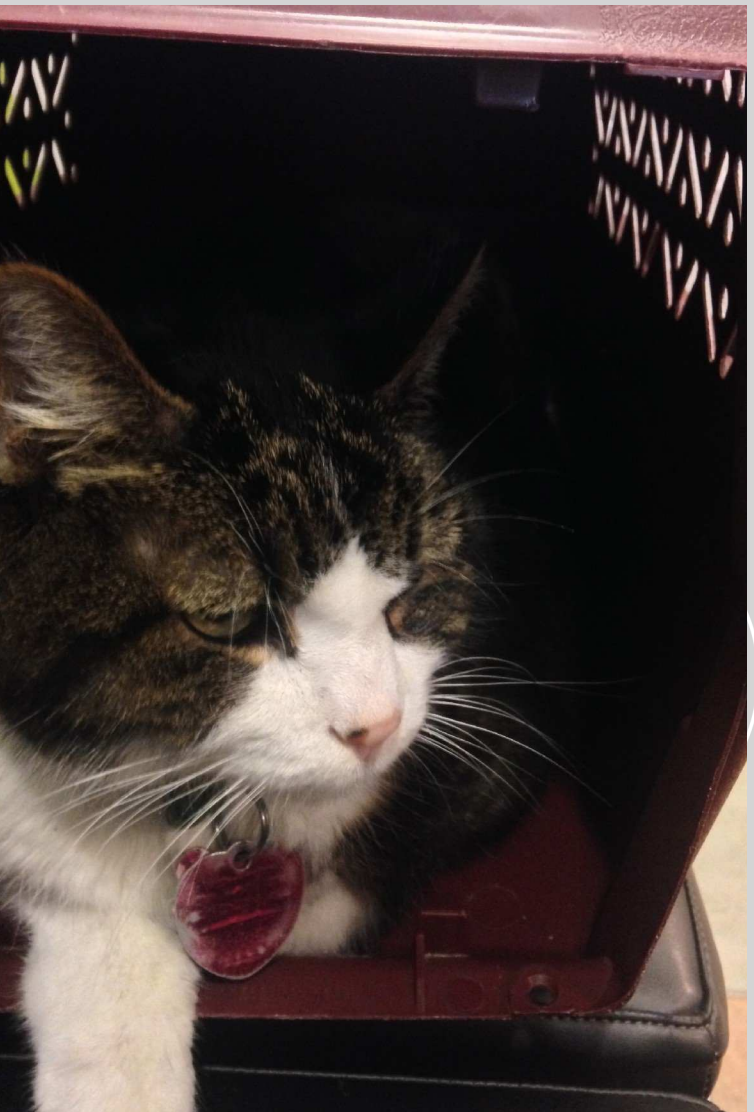


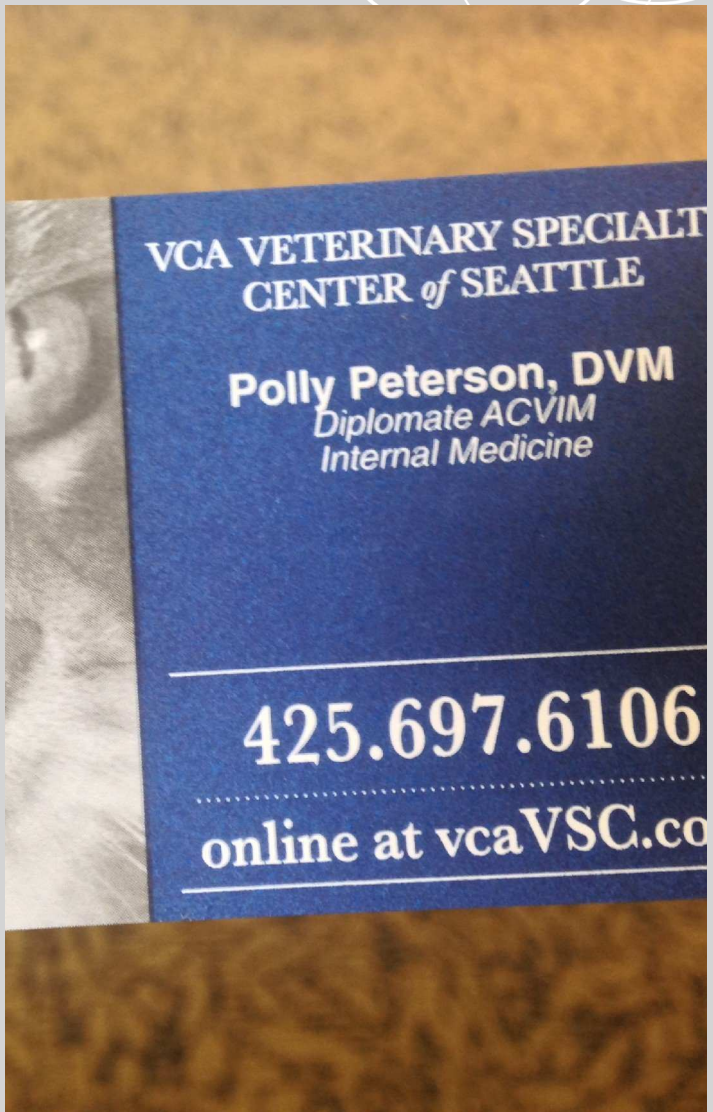
Unfortunately, we were preparing ourselves for the possibility that there might be an underlying problem, perhaps cancer, causing the troubles.





We continued to push for a diagnosis so I took her in for an x-ray, which showed a large mass. This led to another appointment on October 21st for an ultrasound when we learned that there was a suspected cancerous mass on her colon and lesions on her liver. Dr. Peterson had to share that sad news. Even though I knew it was a possibility, I was shocked. My girl was really sick.



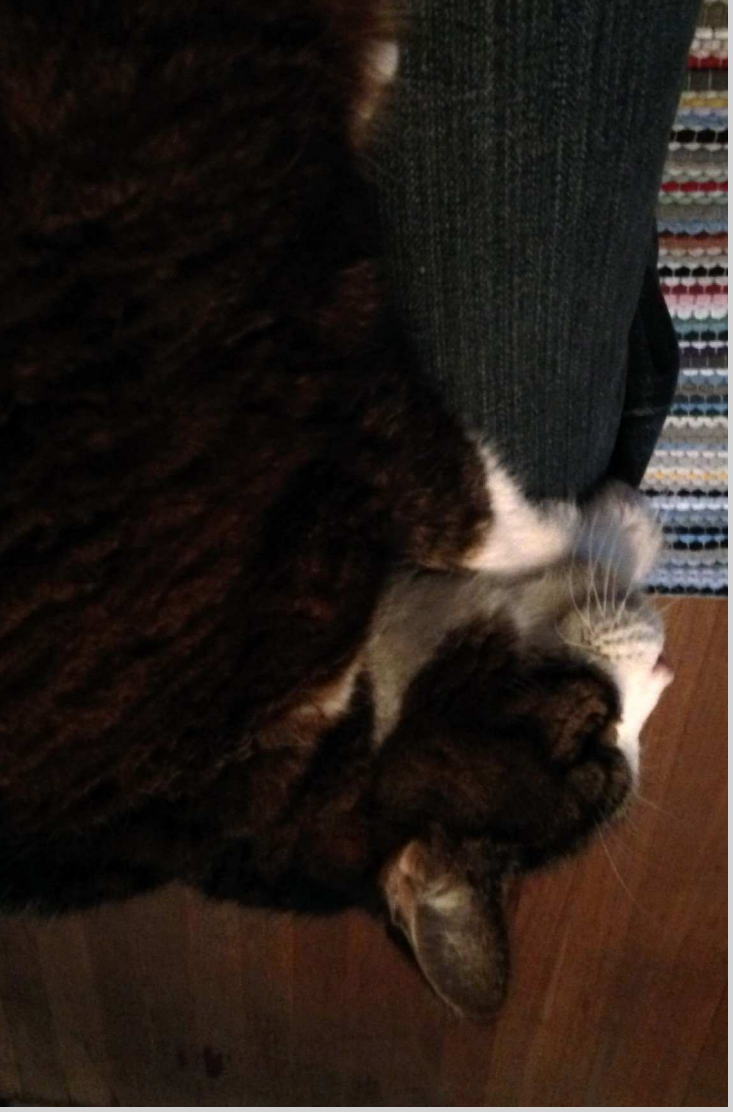


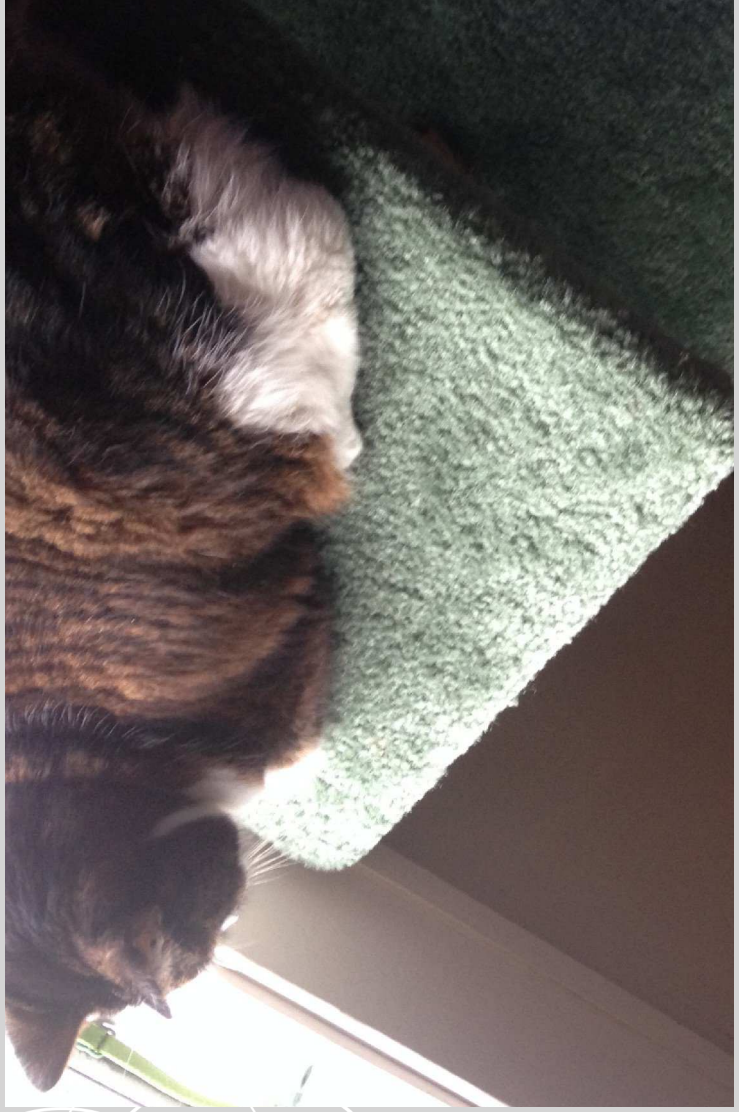
The prognosis for cats with cancer, and Speck's particular situation was poor. Dr. Peterson said if we didn't seek treatment, most likely we would need to put her down. This was devastating.

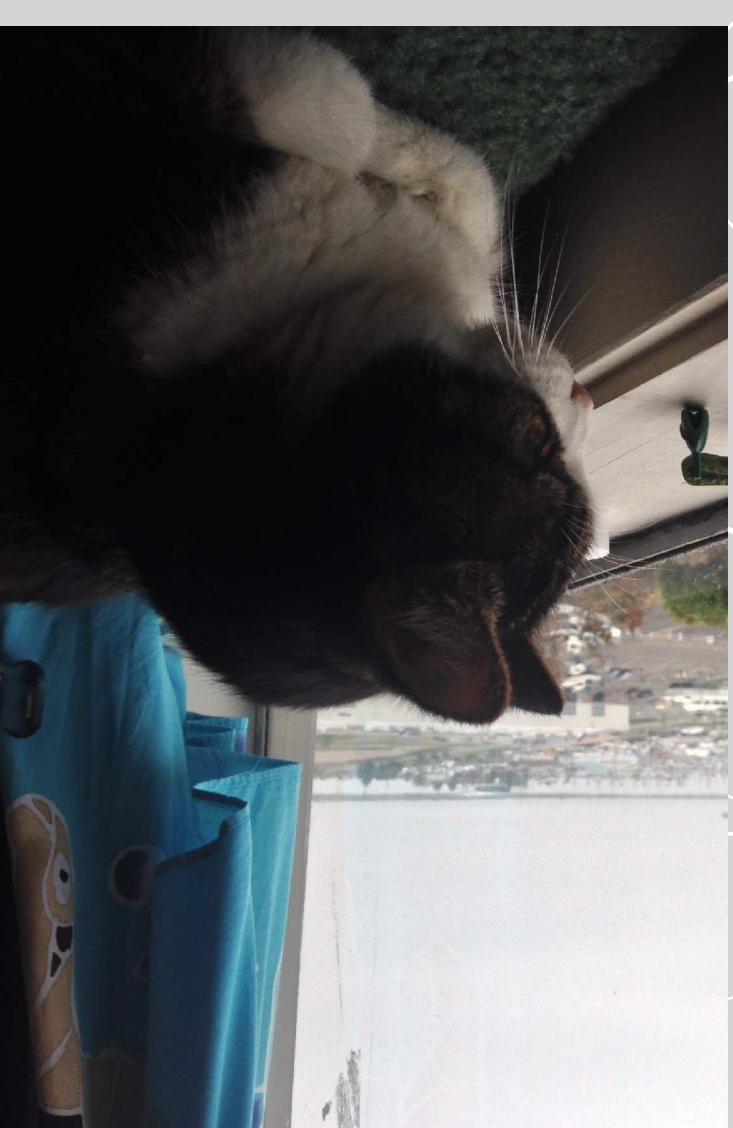
Speck =^.^=

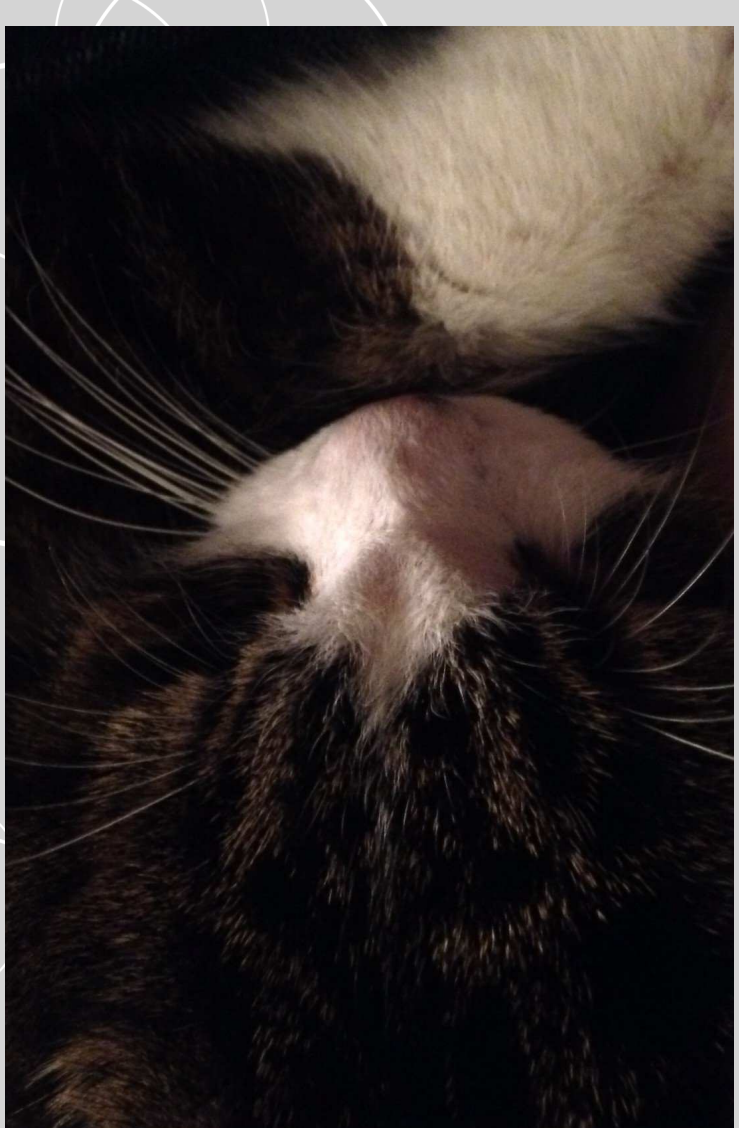
Sunset over the Olympic Range - October 23, 2013

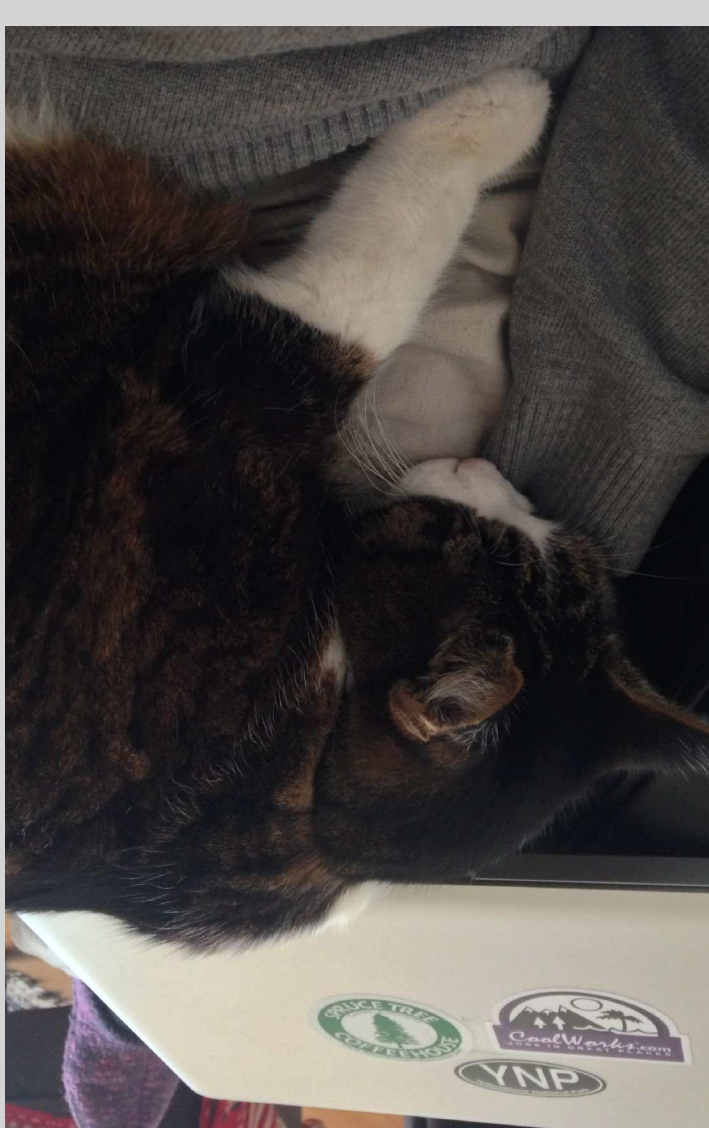
“A cat is only technically an animal, being divine.”
~ Robert Lynd

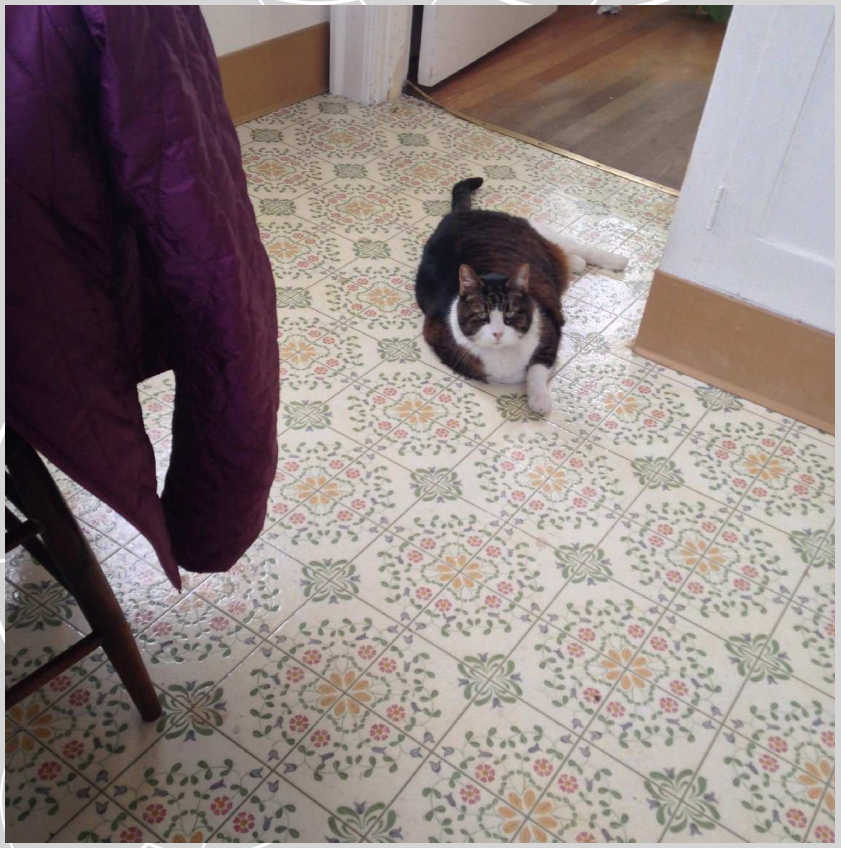


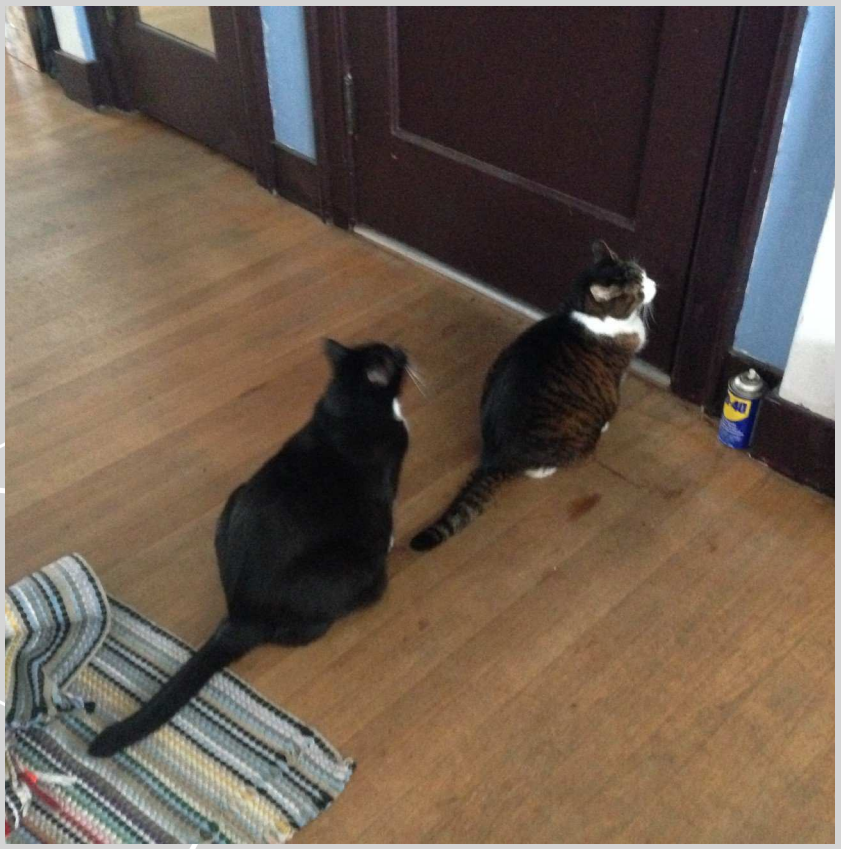


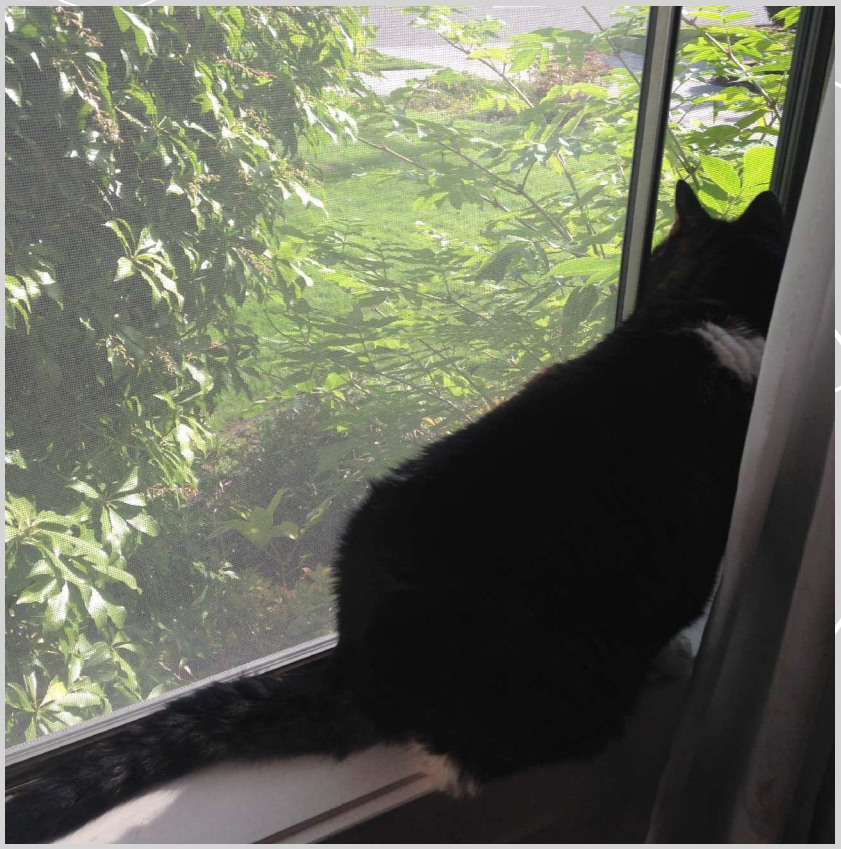





BRUCE TREE COFFEEHOUSE
CoolWorks.com
YNP

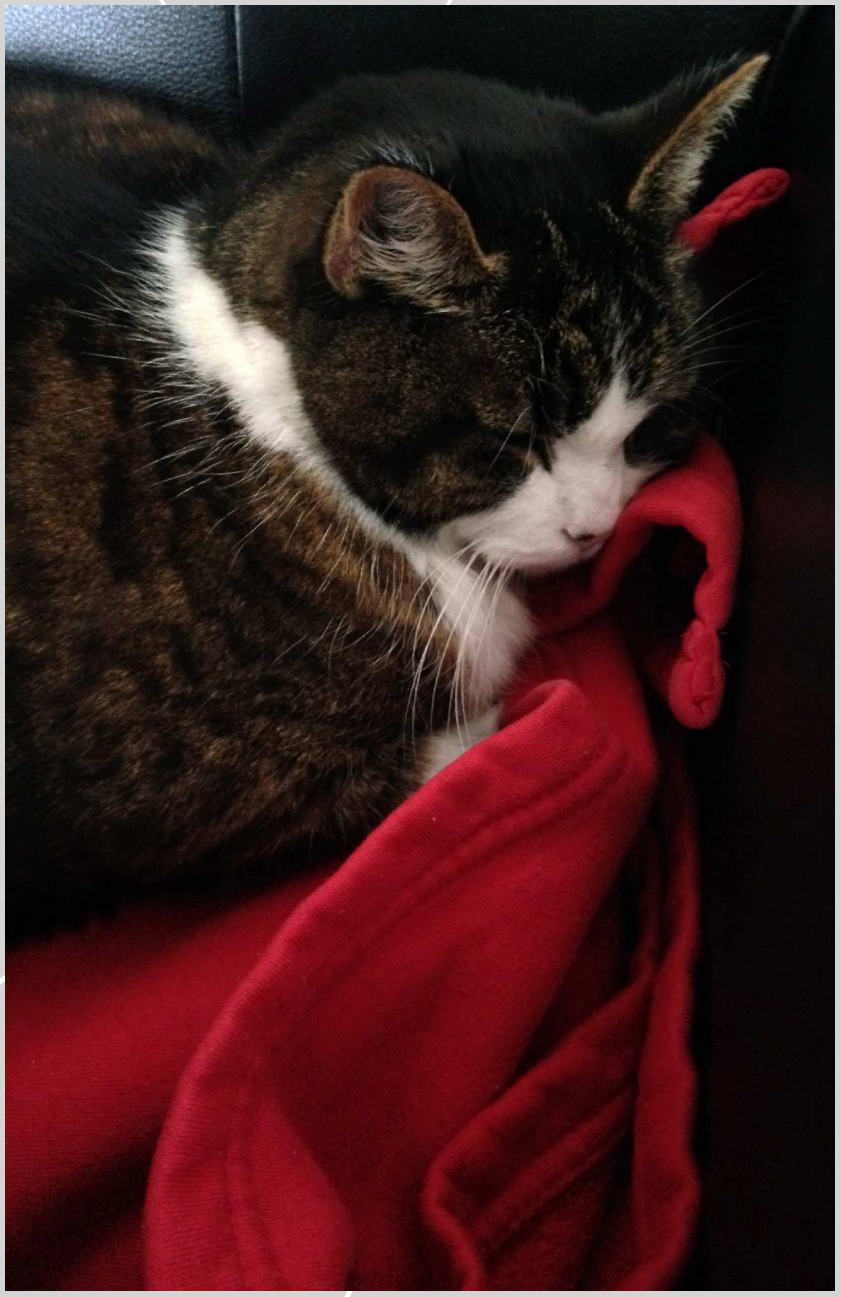


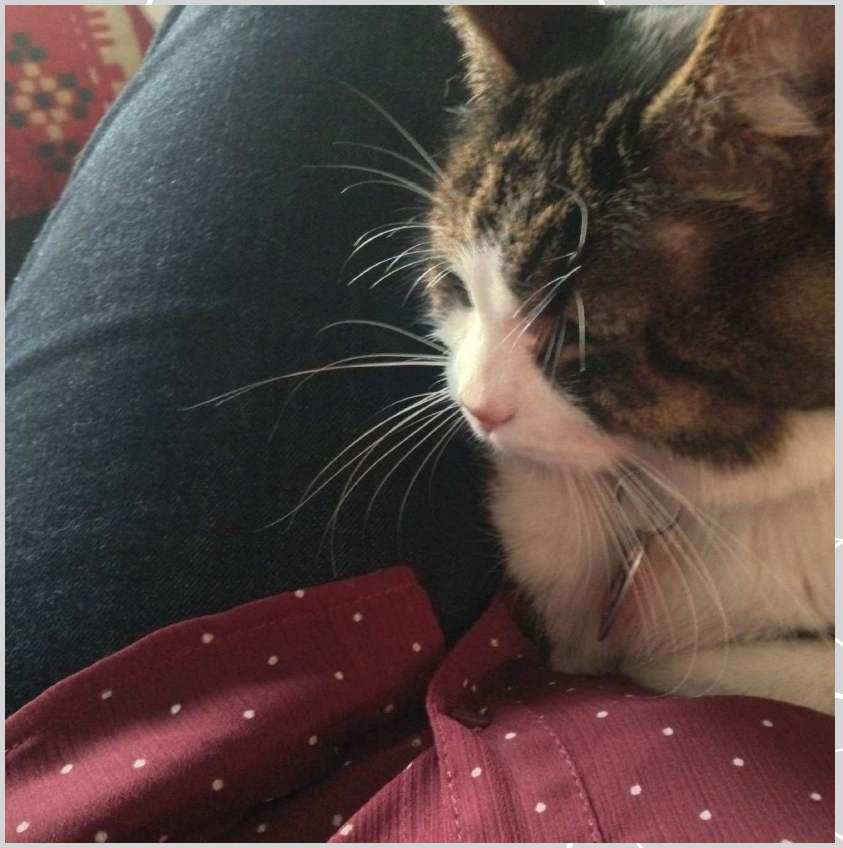


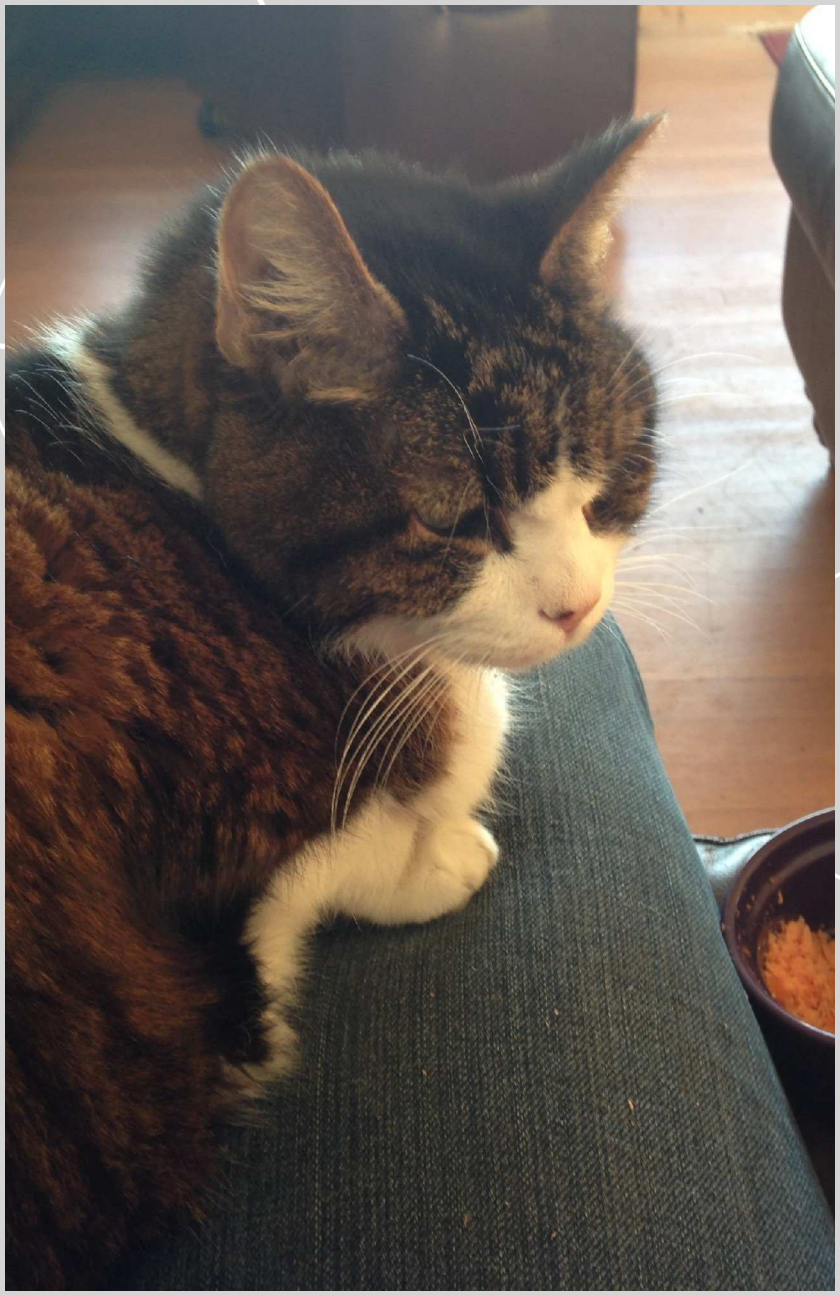


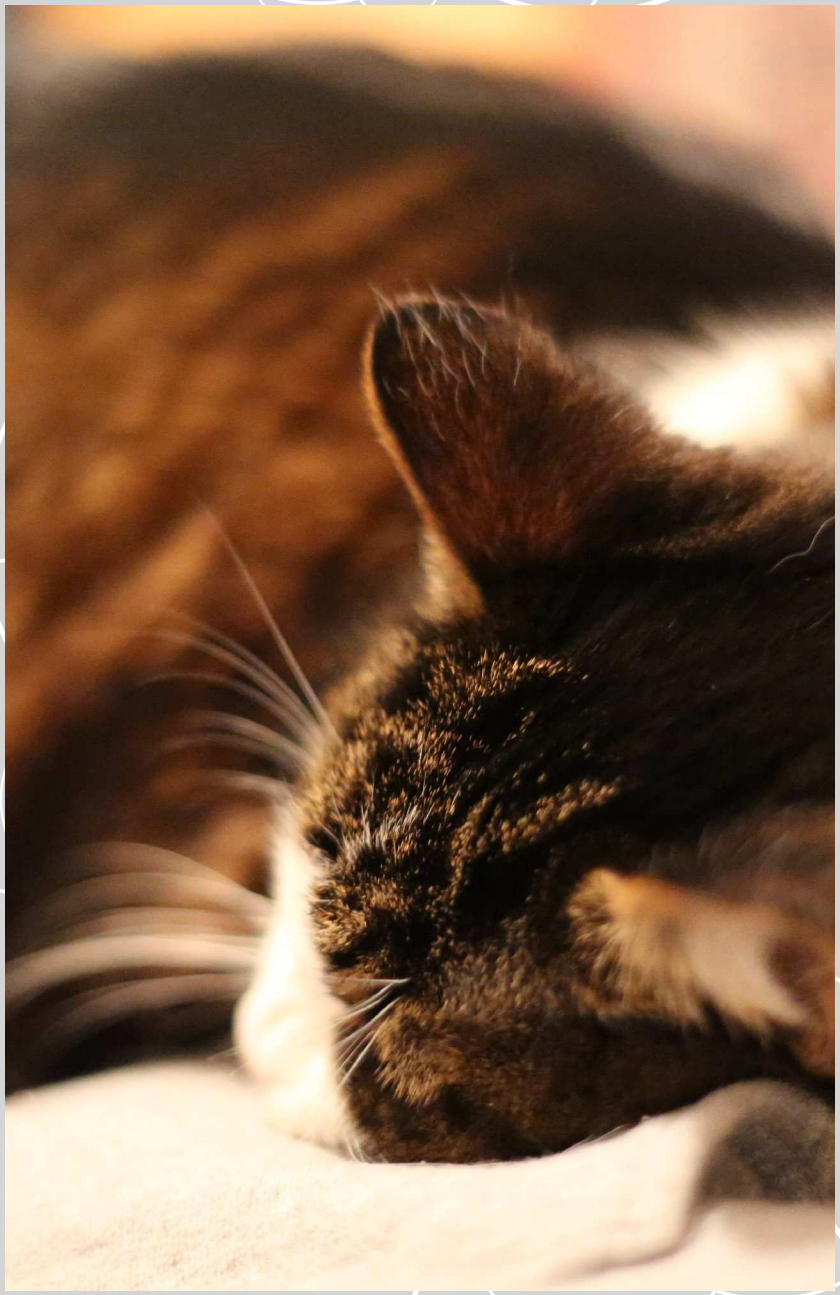
Speck =^.^=

Lap Cat Extraordinaire...





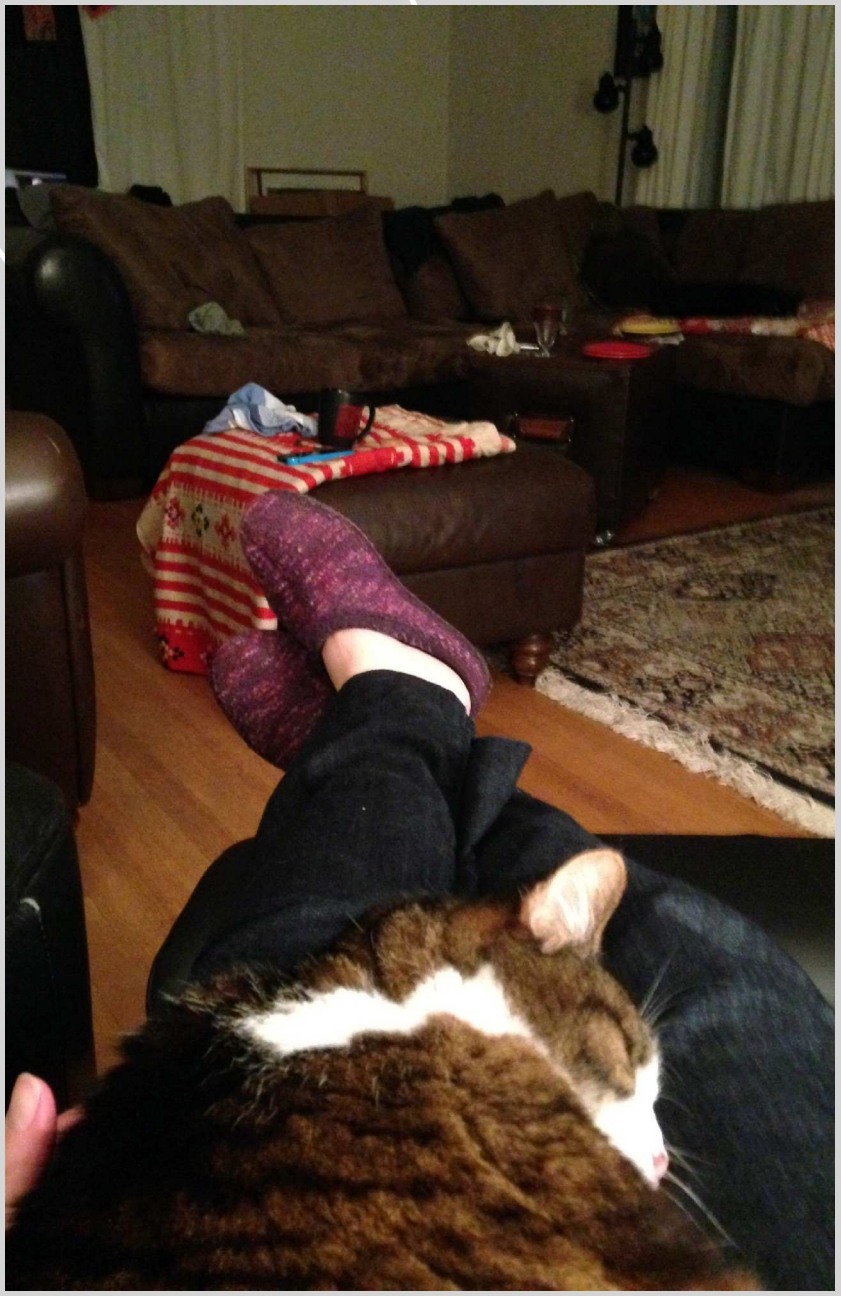


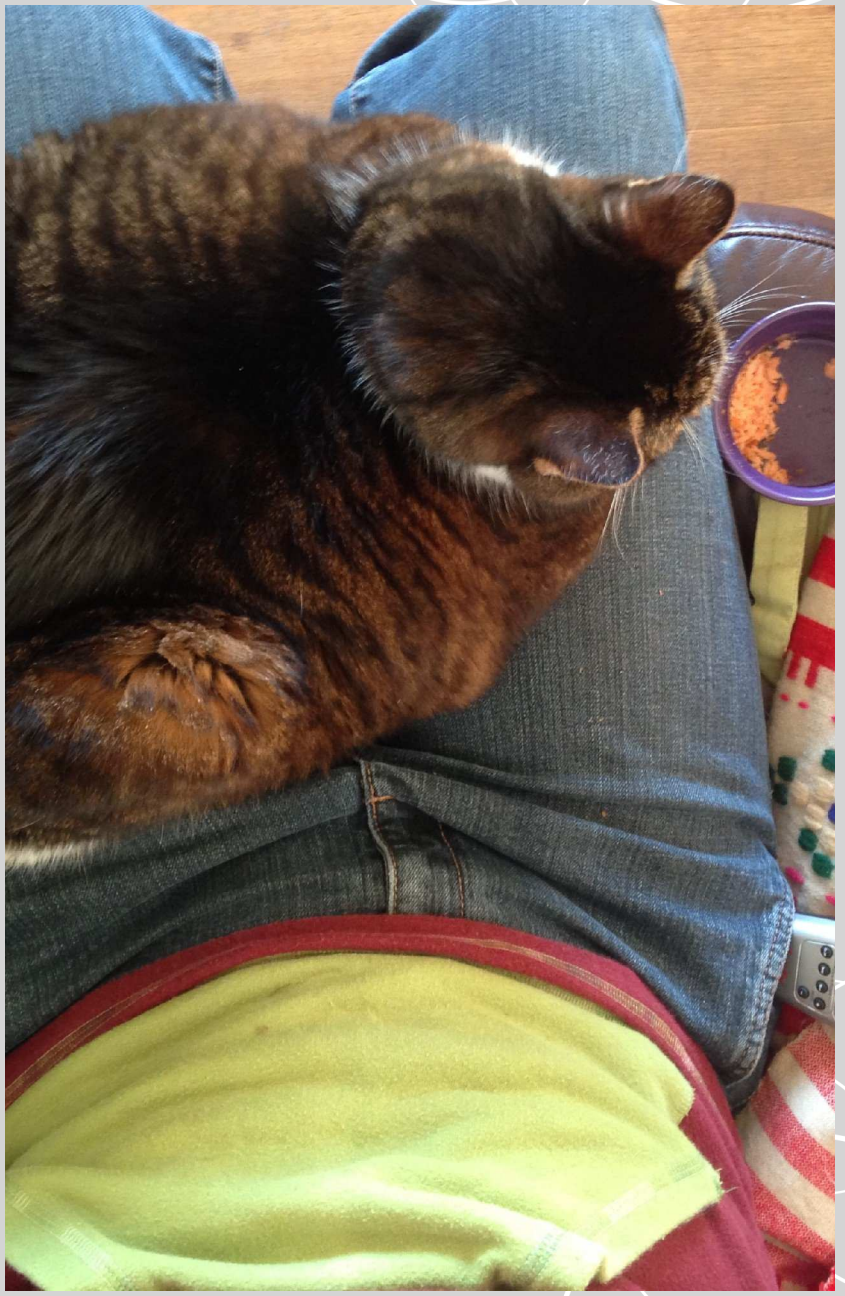


“Once [a cat] has given its love, what absolute confidence, what fidelity of affection! It will make itself the companion of your hours of work, of loneliness, or of sadness. It will lie the whole evening on your knee, purring and happy in your society, and leaving the company of creatures of its own society to be with you.”

~ Théophile Gautier, Ménagerie intime

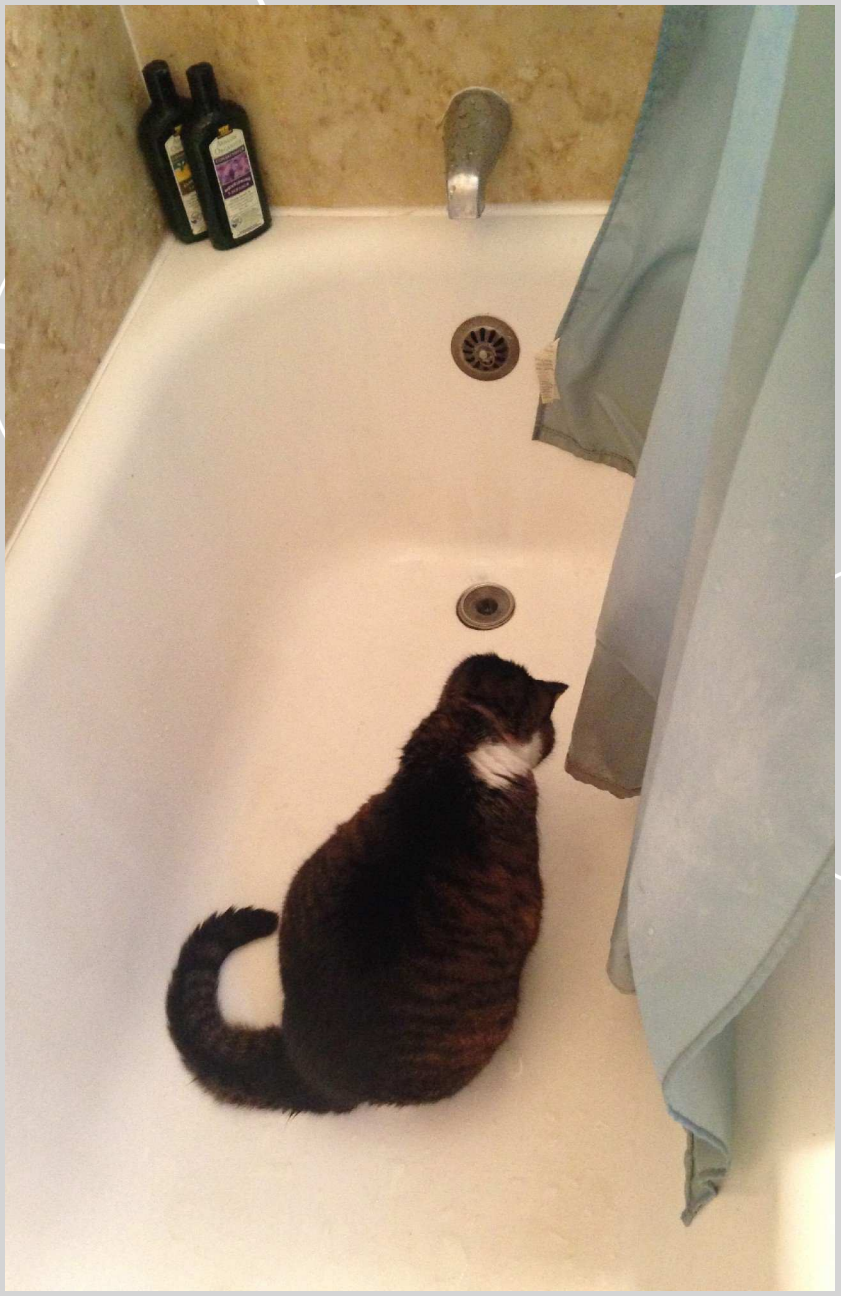
Speck =^.^=

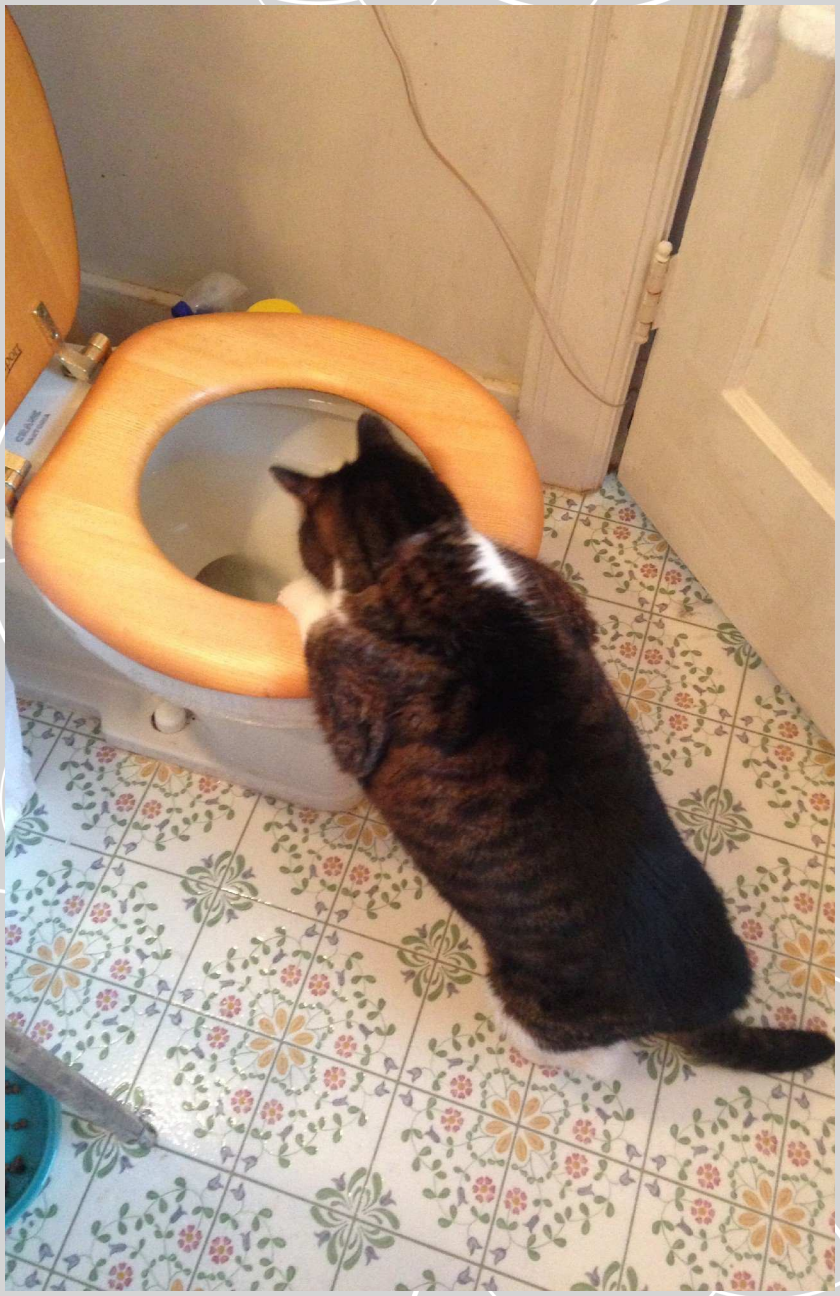




“The cat does not offer services. The cat offers itself.”

~ William S. Burroughs,
The Cat Inside



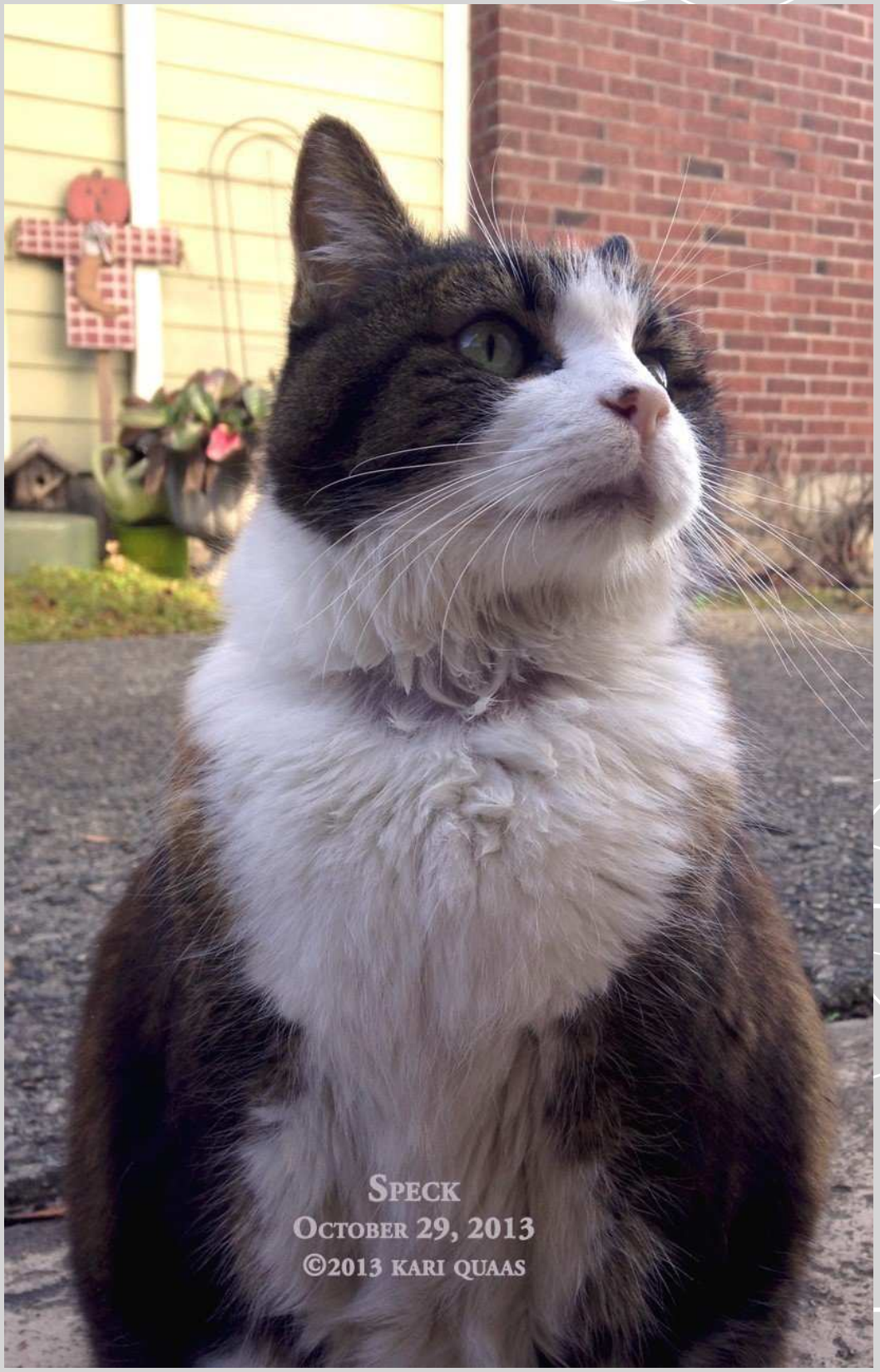


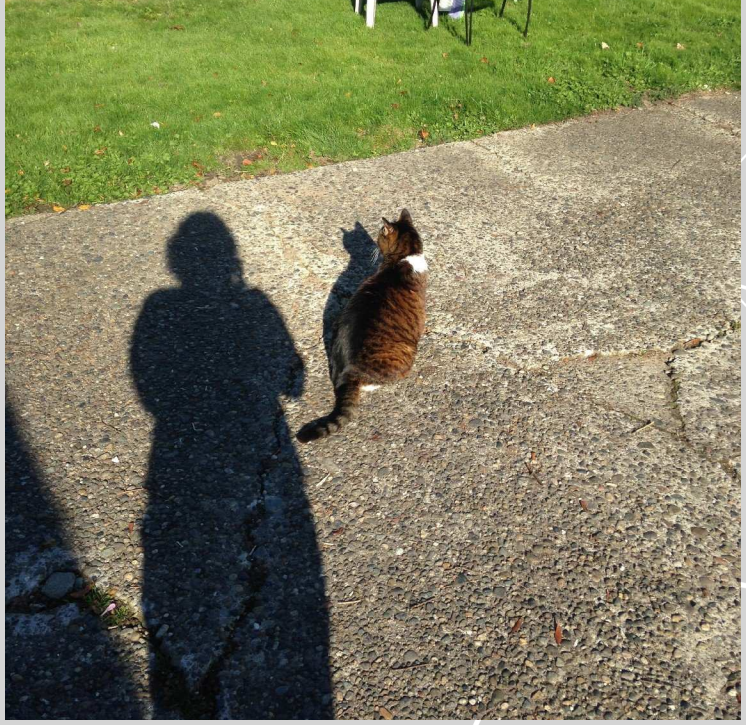
Like always, and especially at the end, she was fascinated with water.

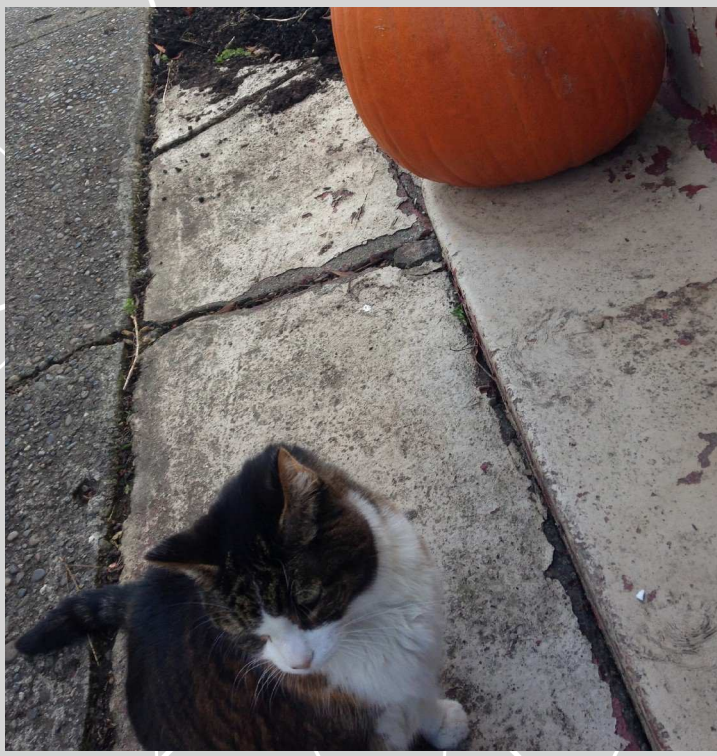
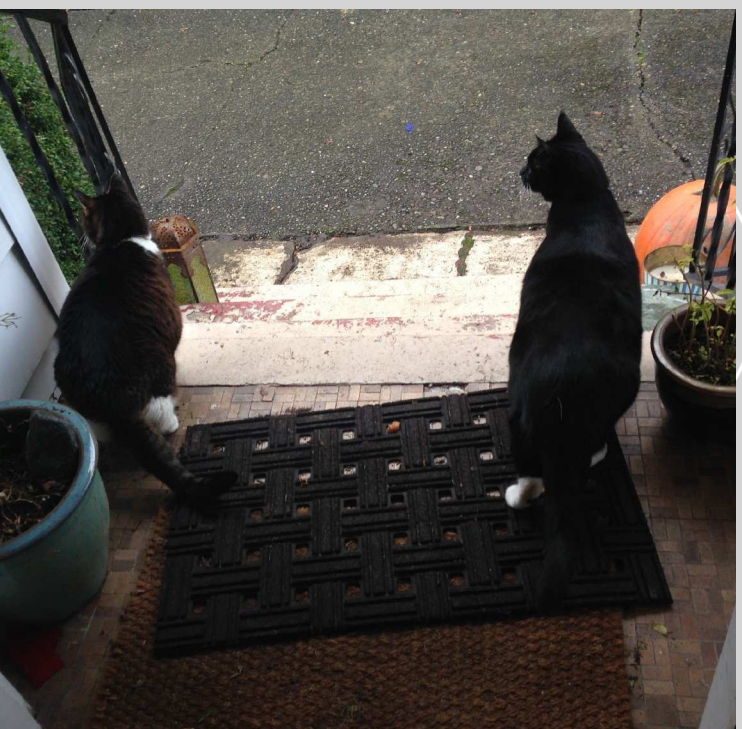
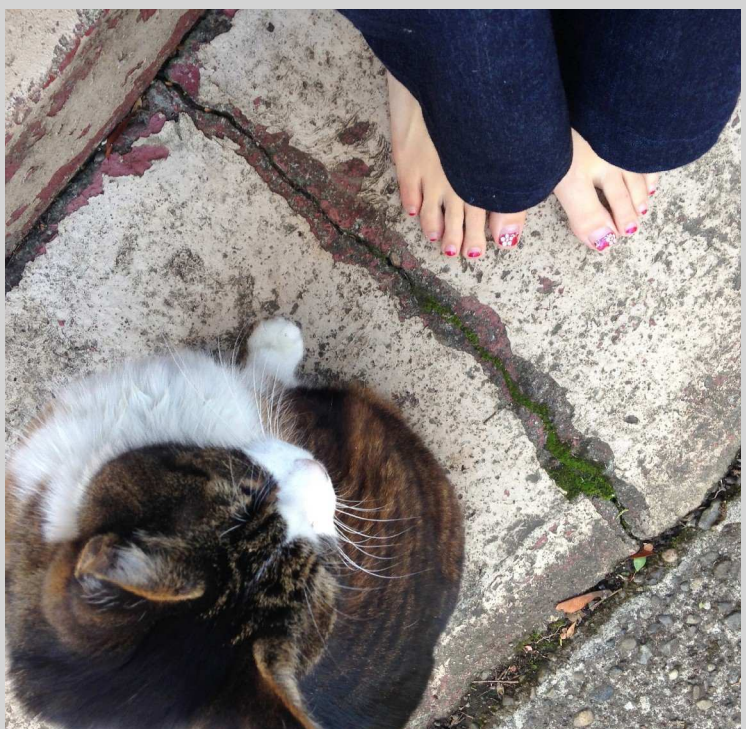
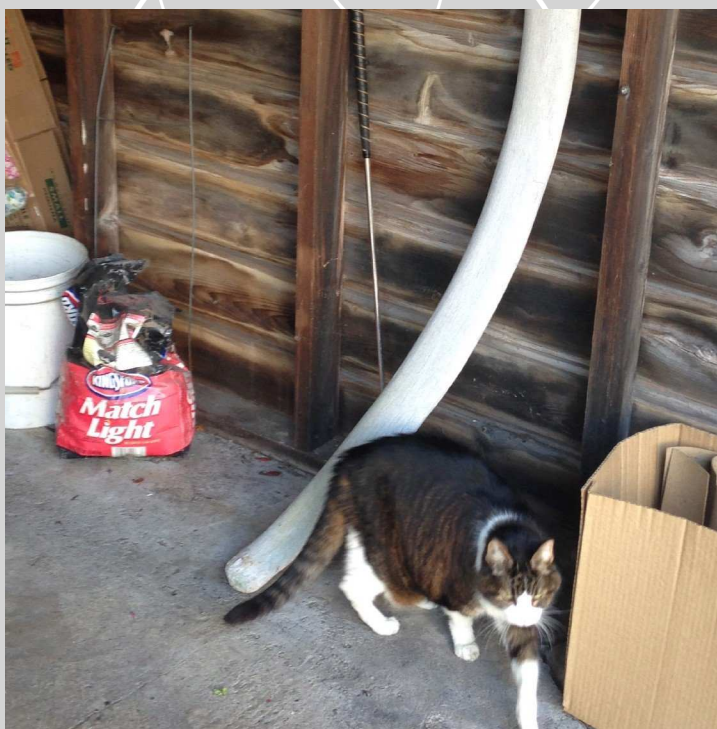
Once she was officially diagnosed with a carcinoma, I deliberated on my own, and with Oliver's input, on whether to seek further treatment for her cancer. In the end, having known how much she detested the medicine we had already given her, and the fact that ultimately she would pass, I decided to not do that and let nature take its course. We would give her the best life we could and love her all the more.

Out of a sense of kindness and a right to know standpoint, I contacted Nate and let him know what was going on. He was sad to hear it, but didn't want to see her.

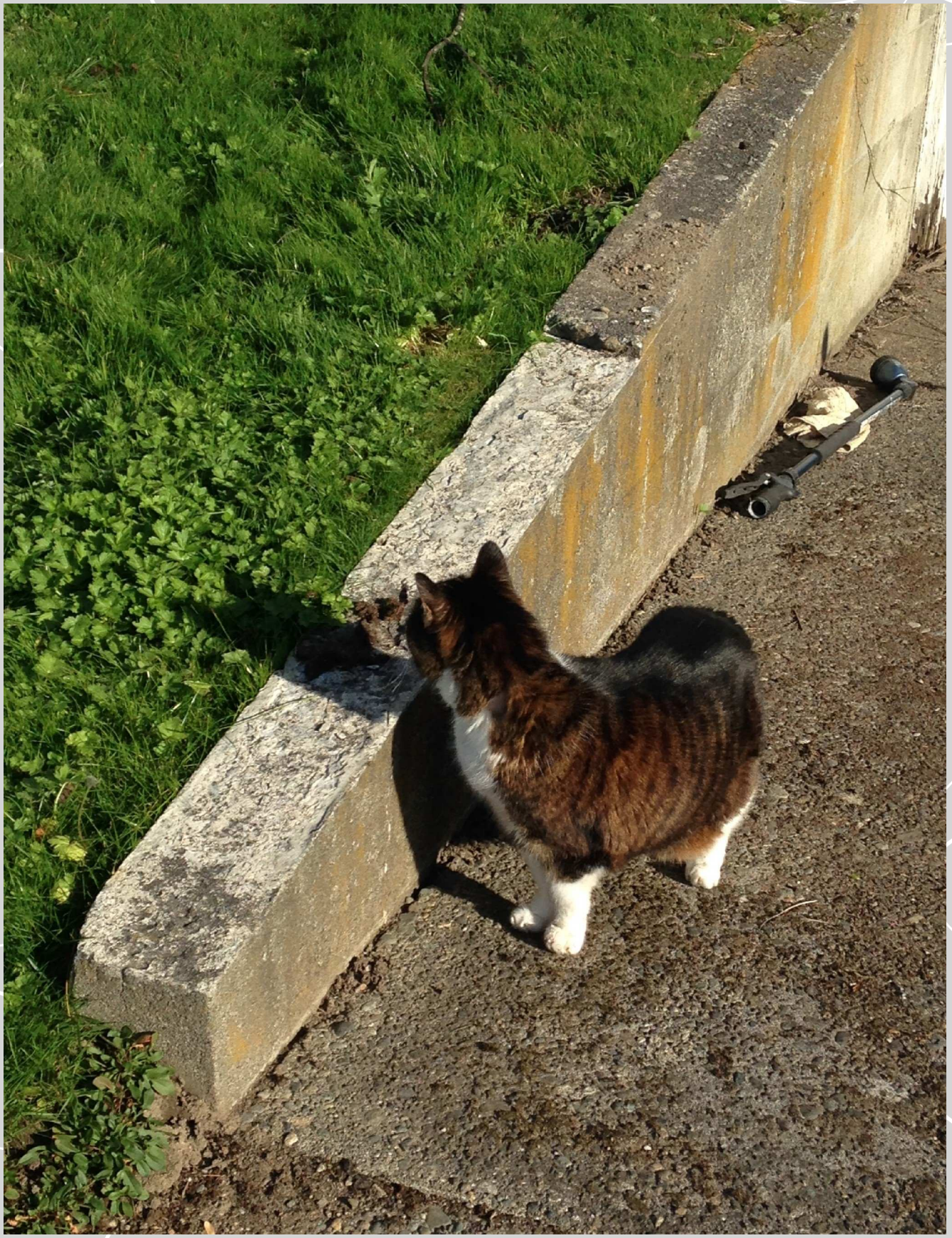
At this point too, we let her roam outside. Why not? She loved being outside and found her special place to drink and play with the water. Joy is good.









Match Light

Speck =^.^=



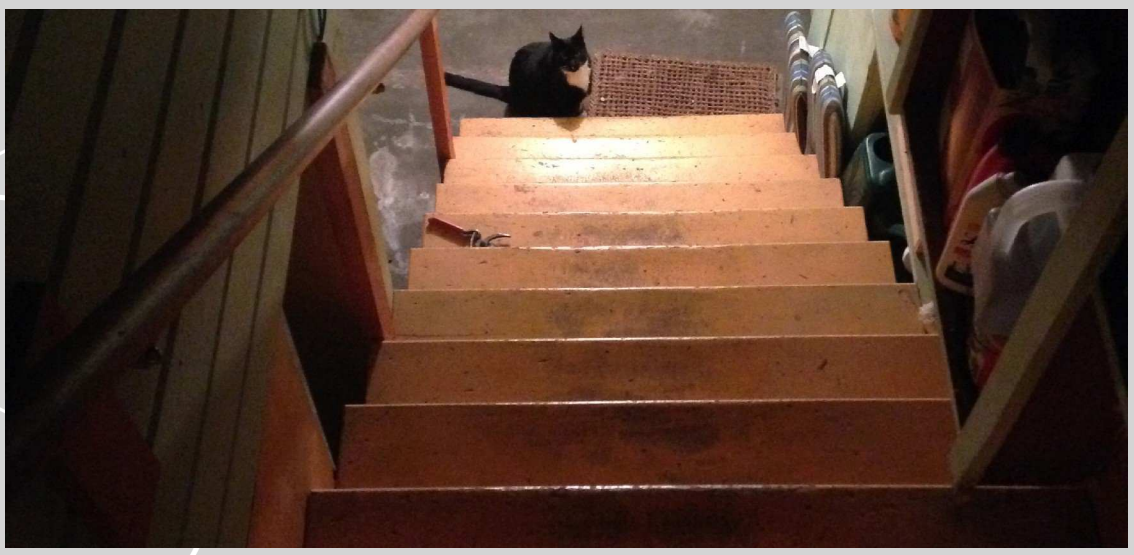
Outdoor Enthusiast...

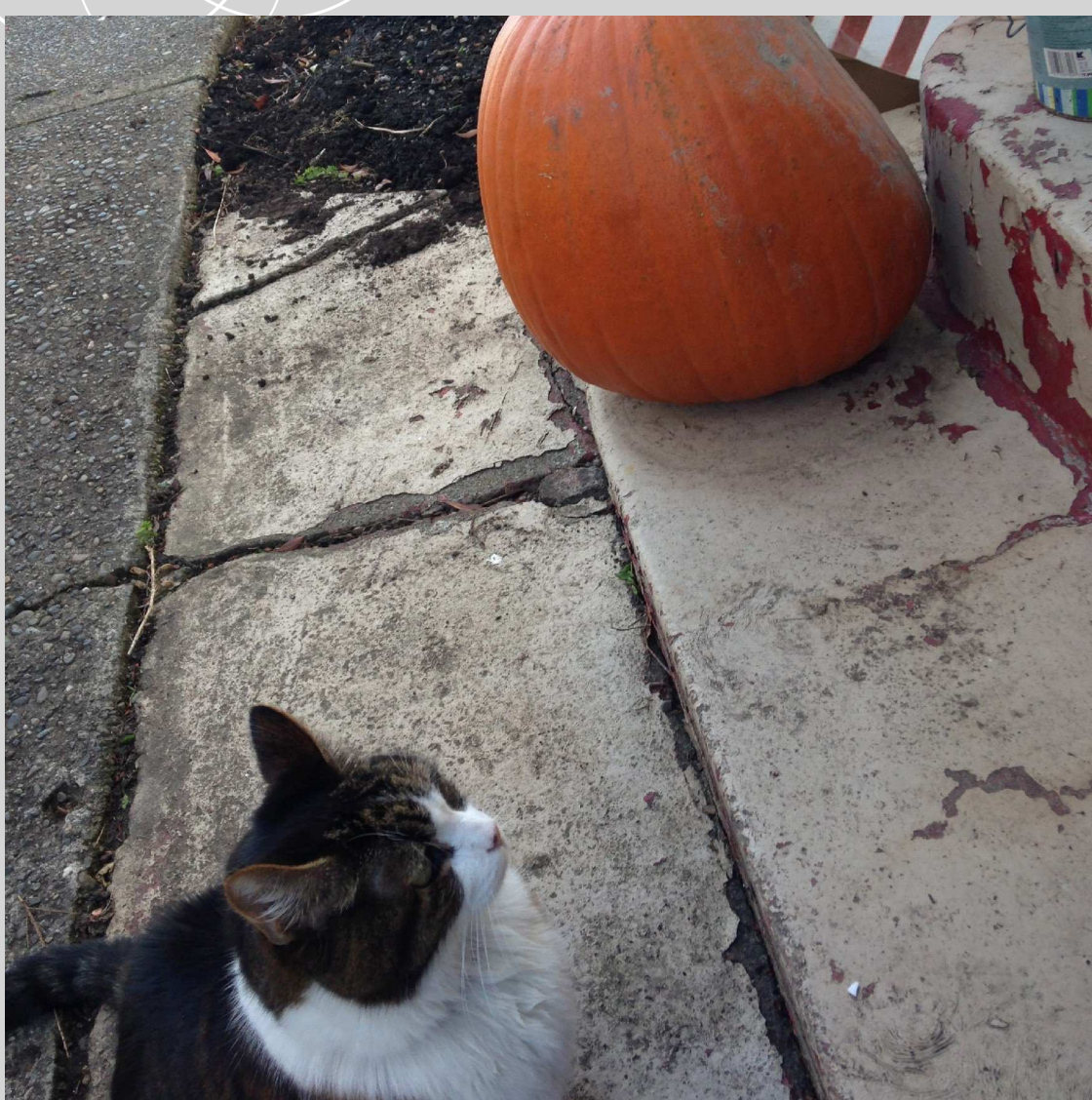
She loved to go outside and drink from this planter by the sunshine garden swag. She loved to be in the out of doors. I was happy that enough time had passed since our move that she was able to wander out on her own and we didn't worry about her running away. She loved us and wanted to be home, but she also love her outside time.

I had Oliver make this series of images when we knew that time was short.

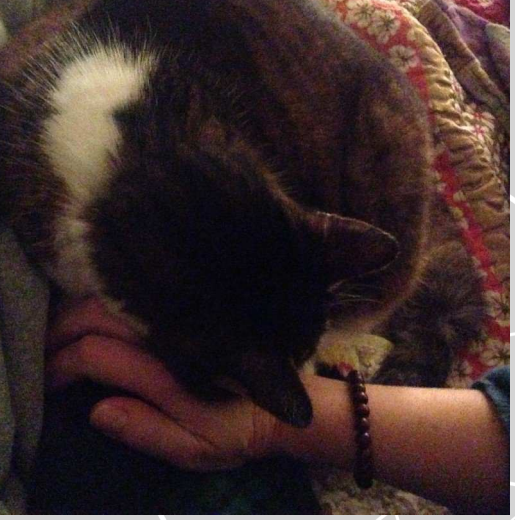
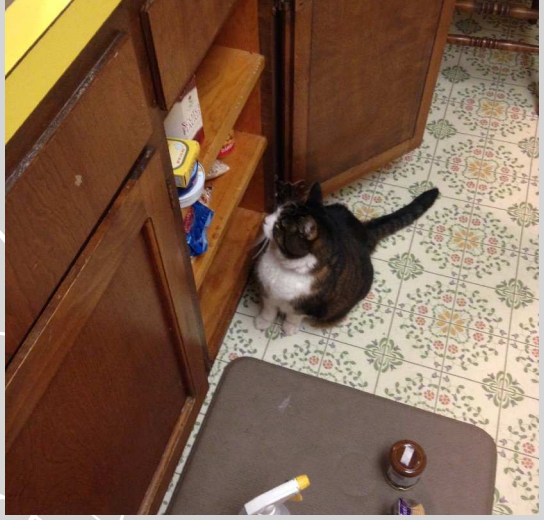
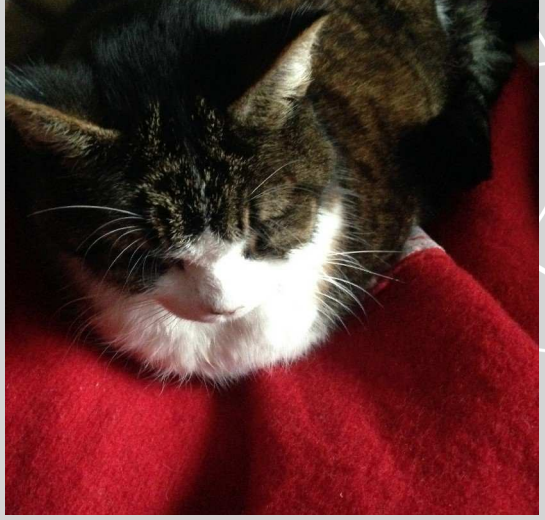
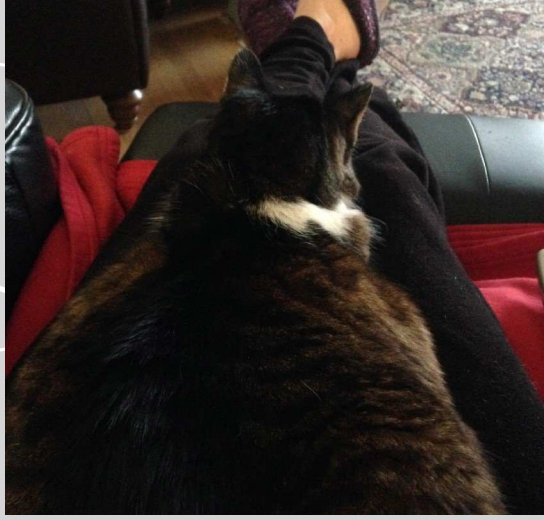
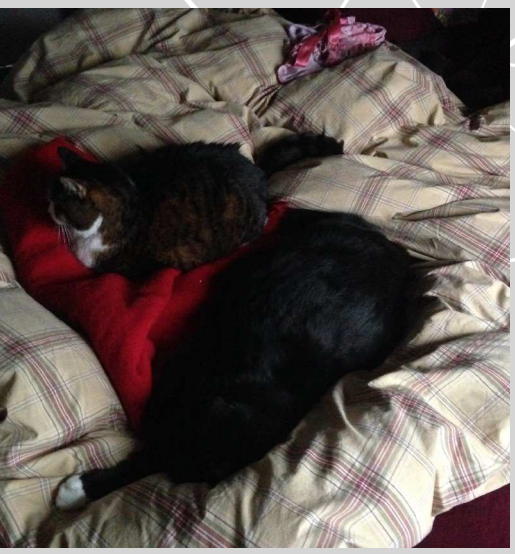
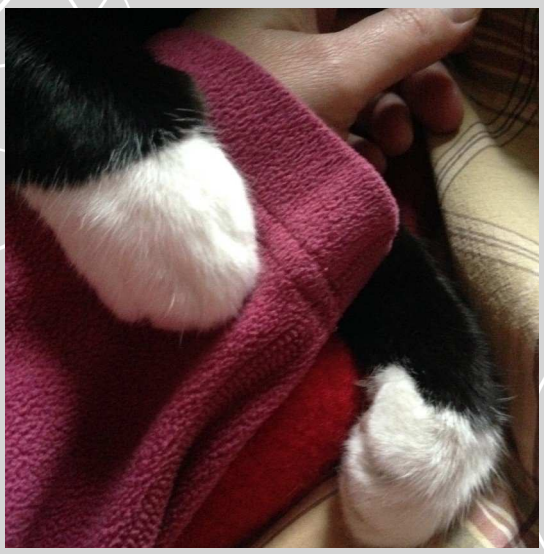
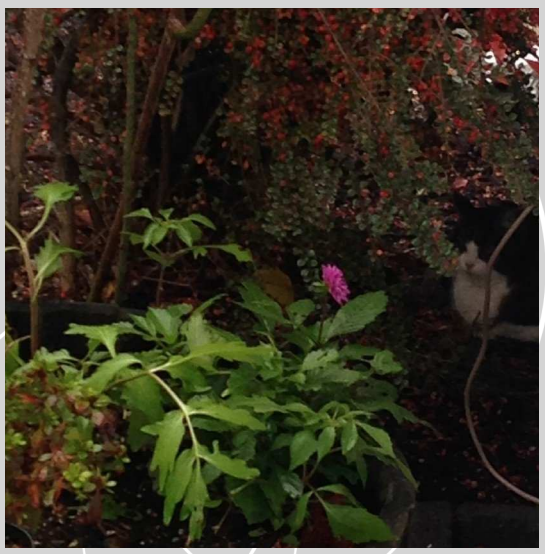
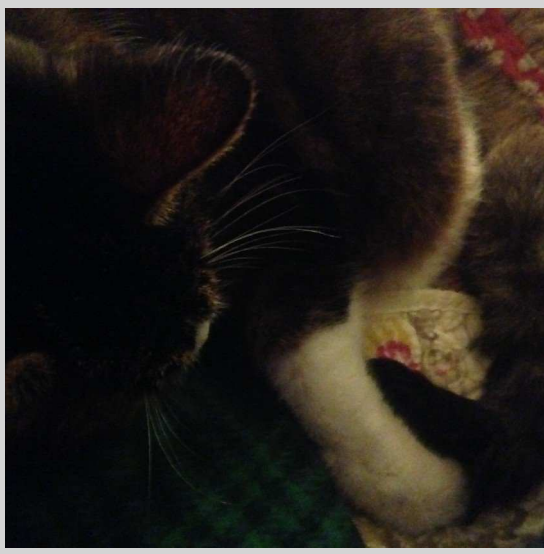
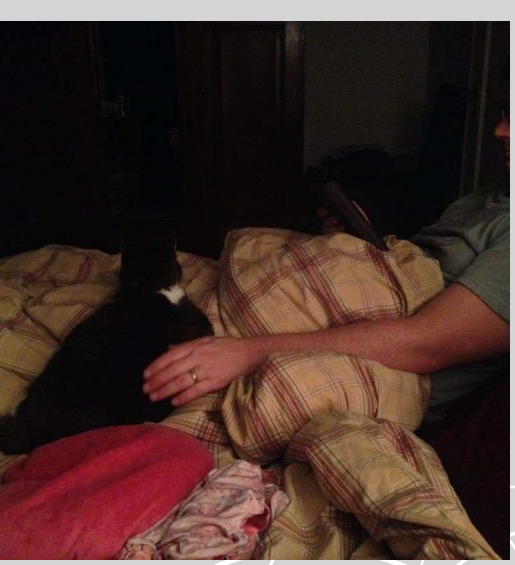
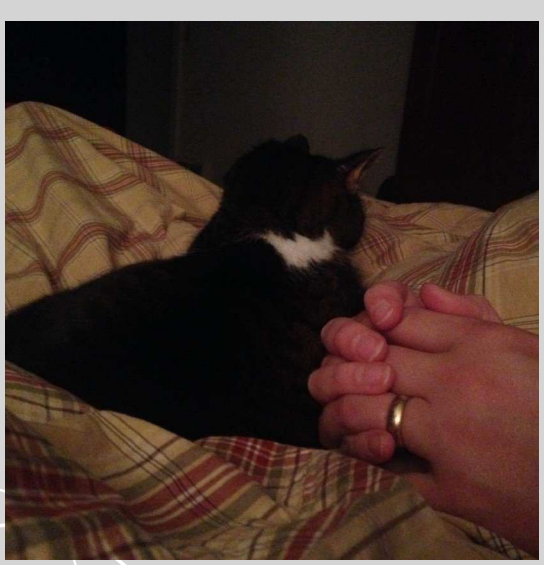
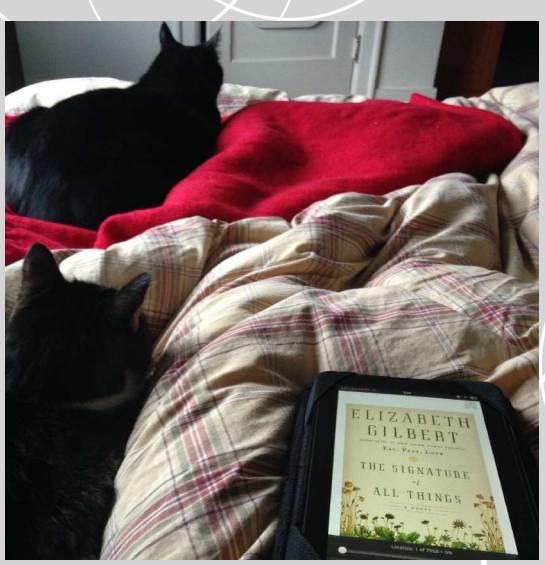
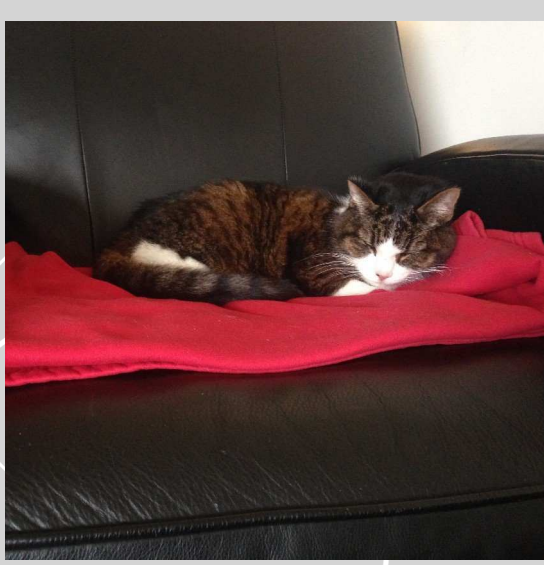
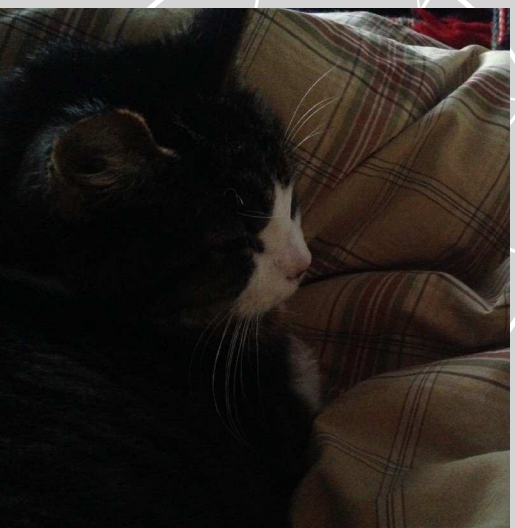
November 2, 2013

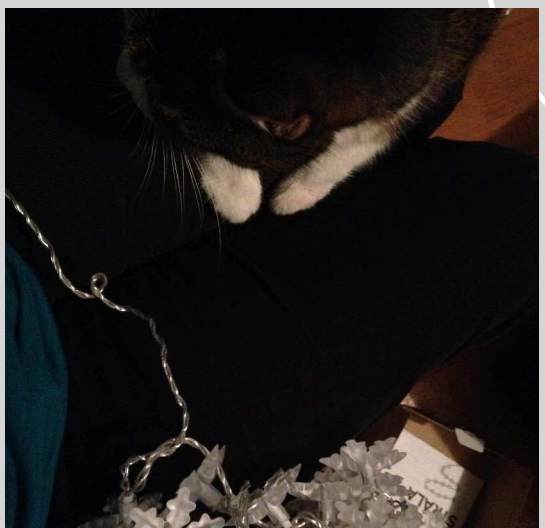
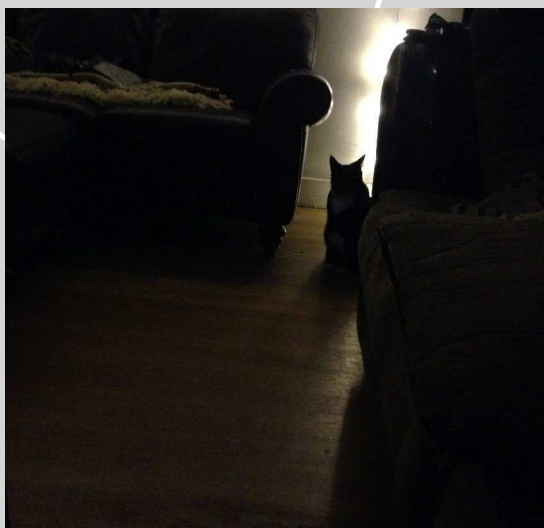
Both cats got more brave, wandering up and down the stairs to the basement and the sleeping areas on the second floor. It was nice to see them getting used to their new home.



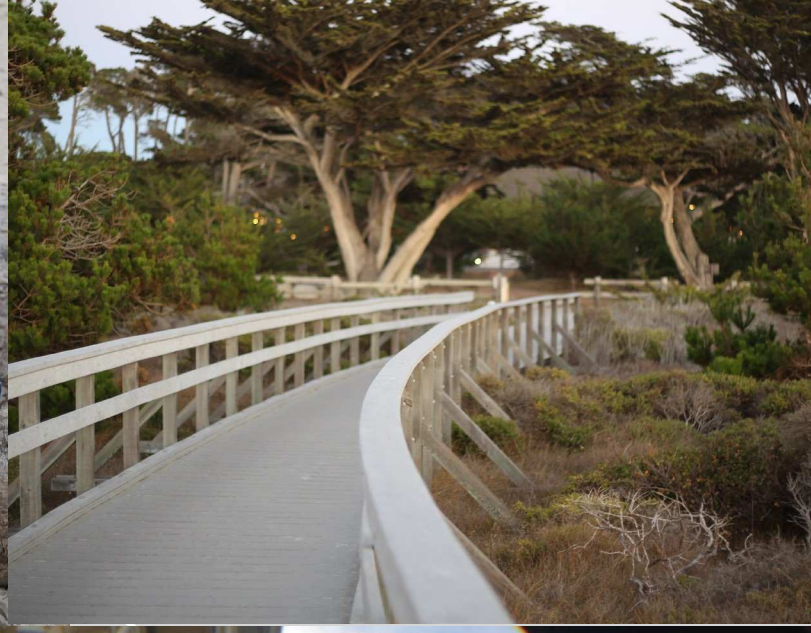


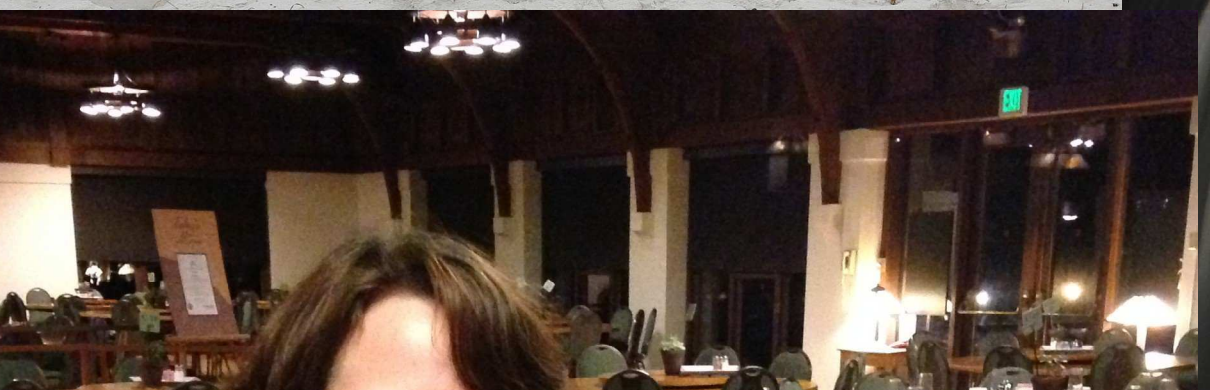
Just call me the Recess Supervisor.












ELIZABETH
GILBERT
THE SIGNATURE
of
ALL THINGS



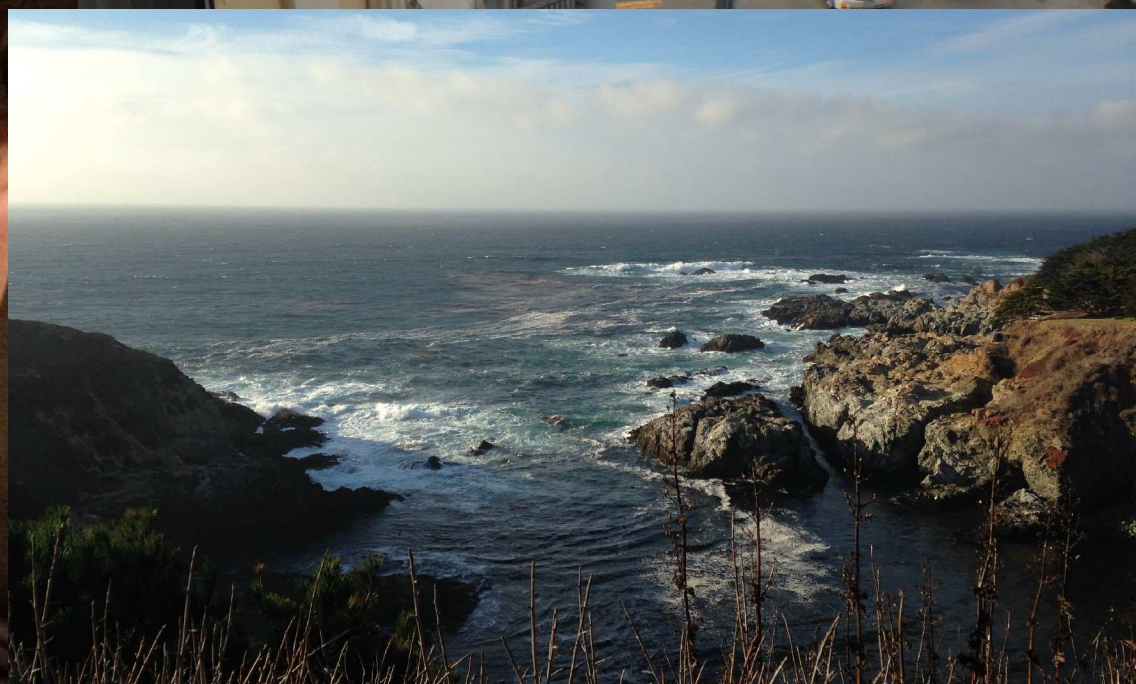



In early November, as much as I didn't want to leave her, I went to the SHRA conference on the Monterey Peninsula where I hung out with my Cool Works partners. My stress and guilt were palpable. I told her that if she needed to go while I was away, it was okay, but I hoped to see her on Friday when I returned. She held on. Om Mani Padme Hum.



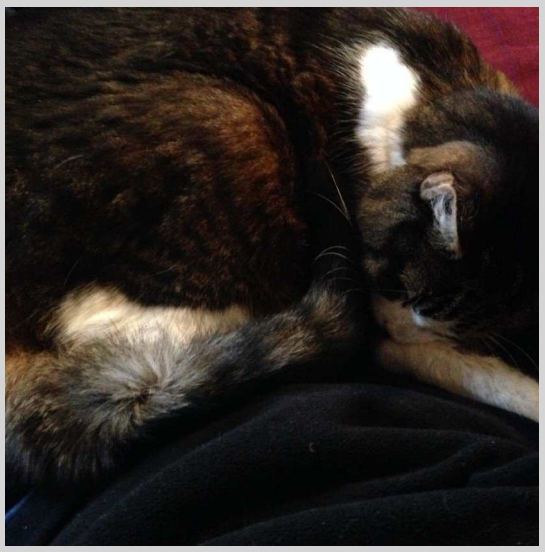


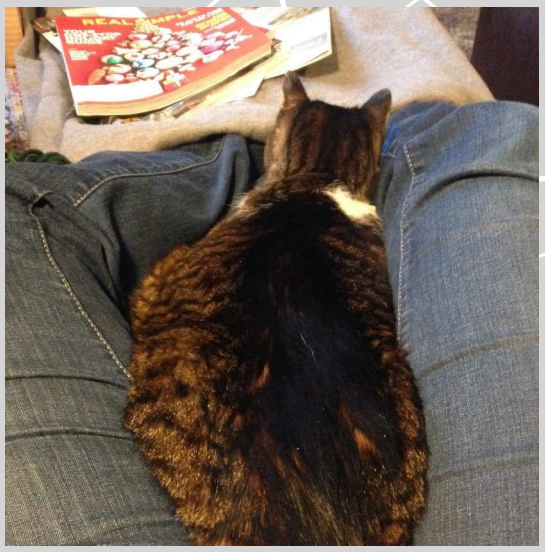
Amanda,
Kari, Linda
and Jennifer at
Asilomar

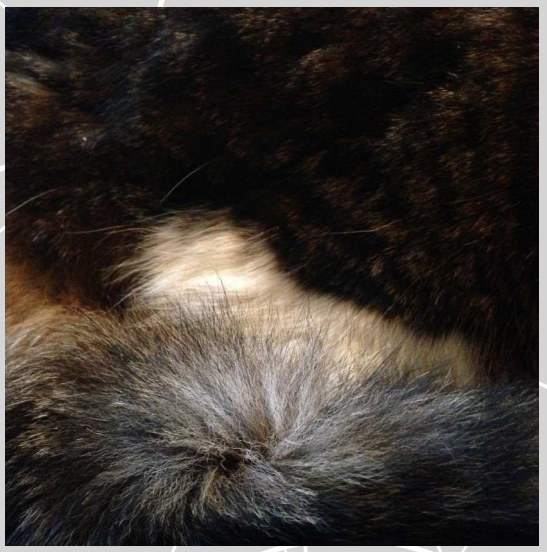


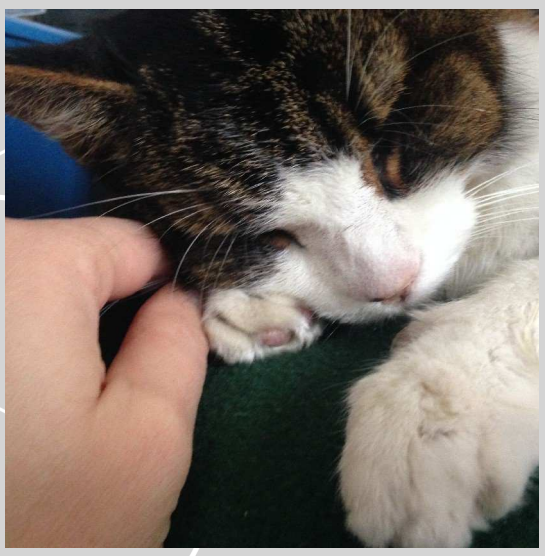
When I returned from California, I became a flat surface for Speck to lie upon. We were glued together and I treasure all of that wonderful lap time and bed time. I knew in leaving that I was putting a lot of pressure on Oliver, but she stuck around and although she slid a bit, she was waiting for me.

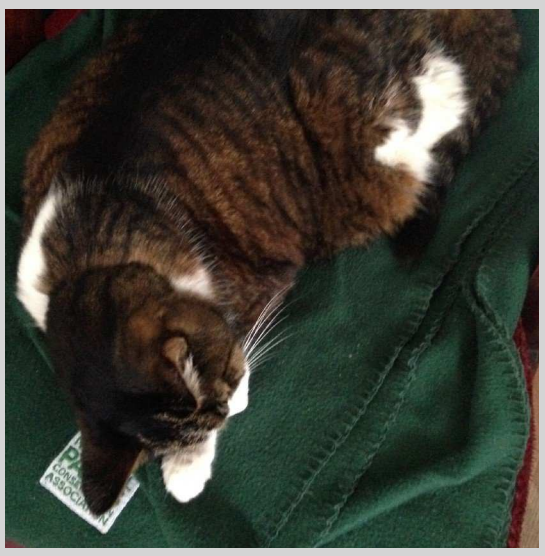
Her back legs gave out on the Wednesday before my return. When I got back, I had to carry her around with me to keep her in view. I really was the greater part of her joy at the end because she couldn't make it outside on her own. It was sweet and sad at the same time.

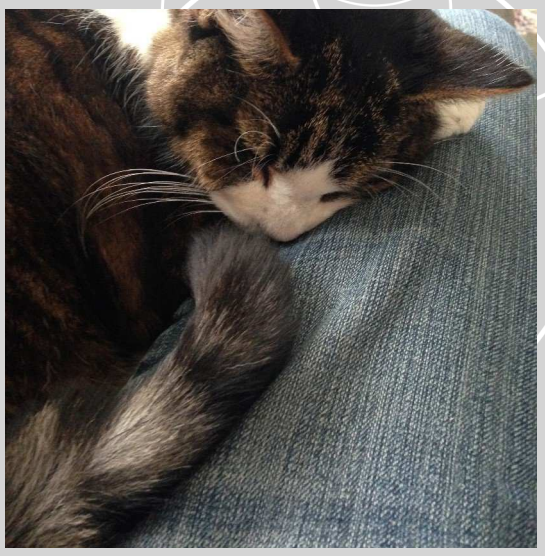


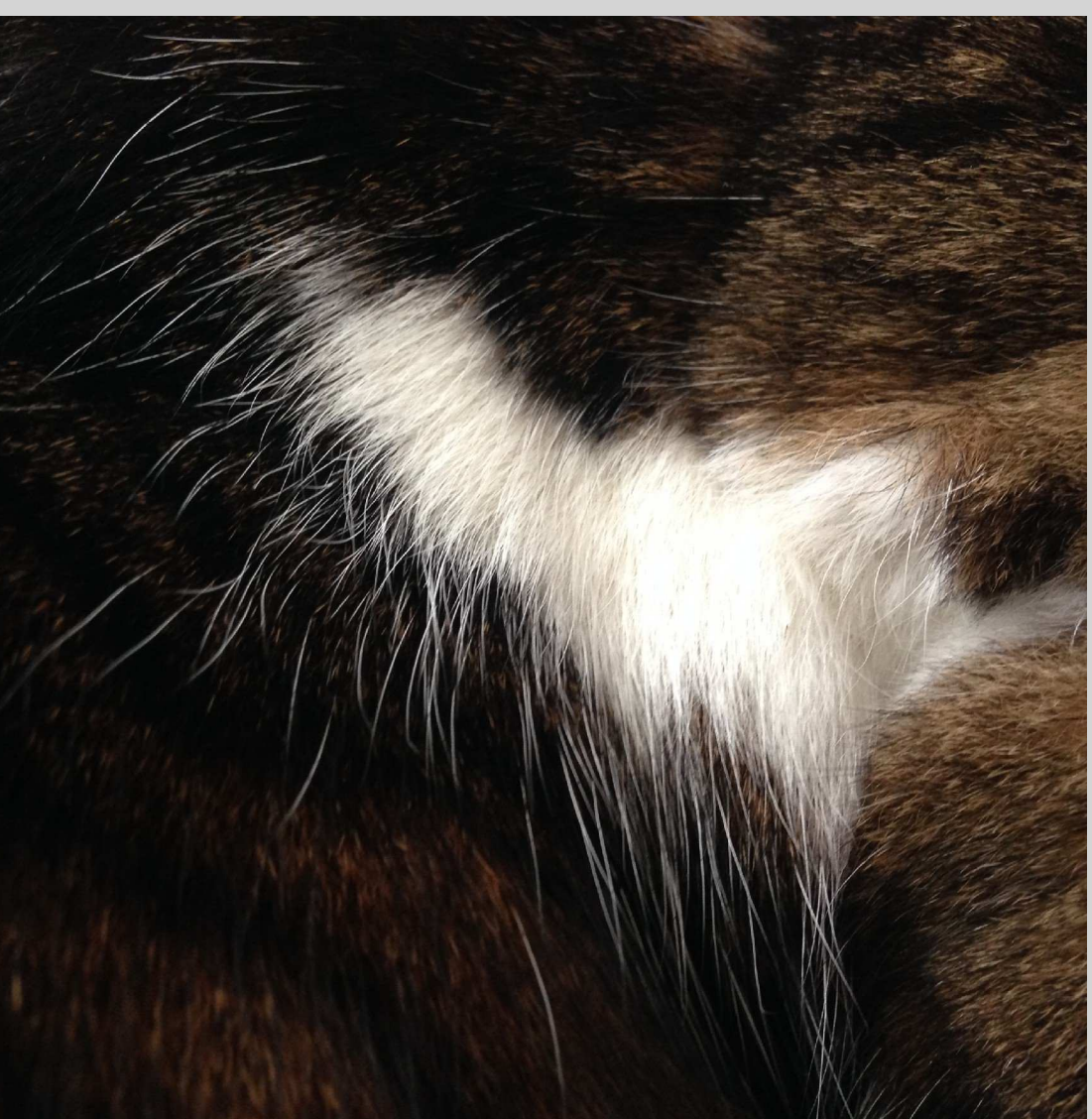


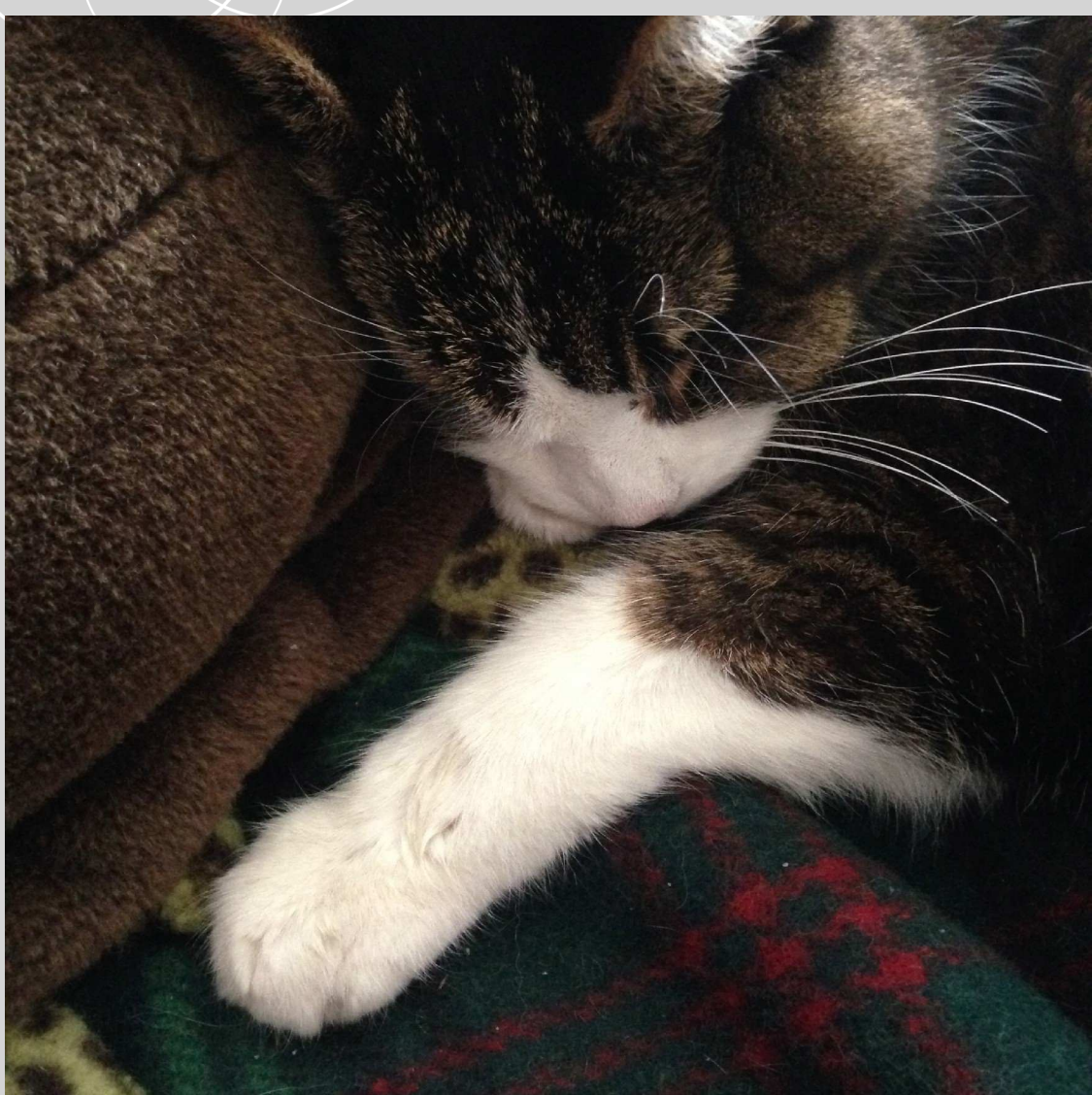


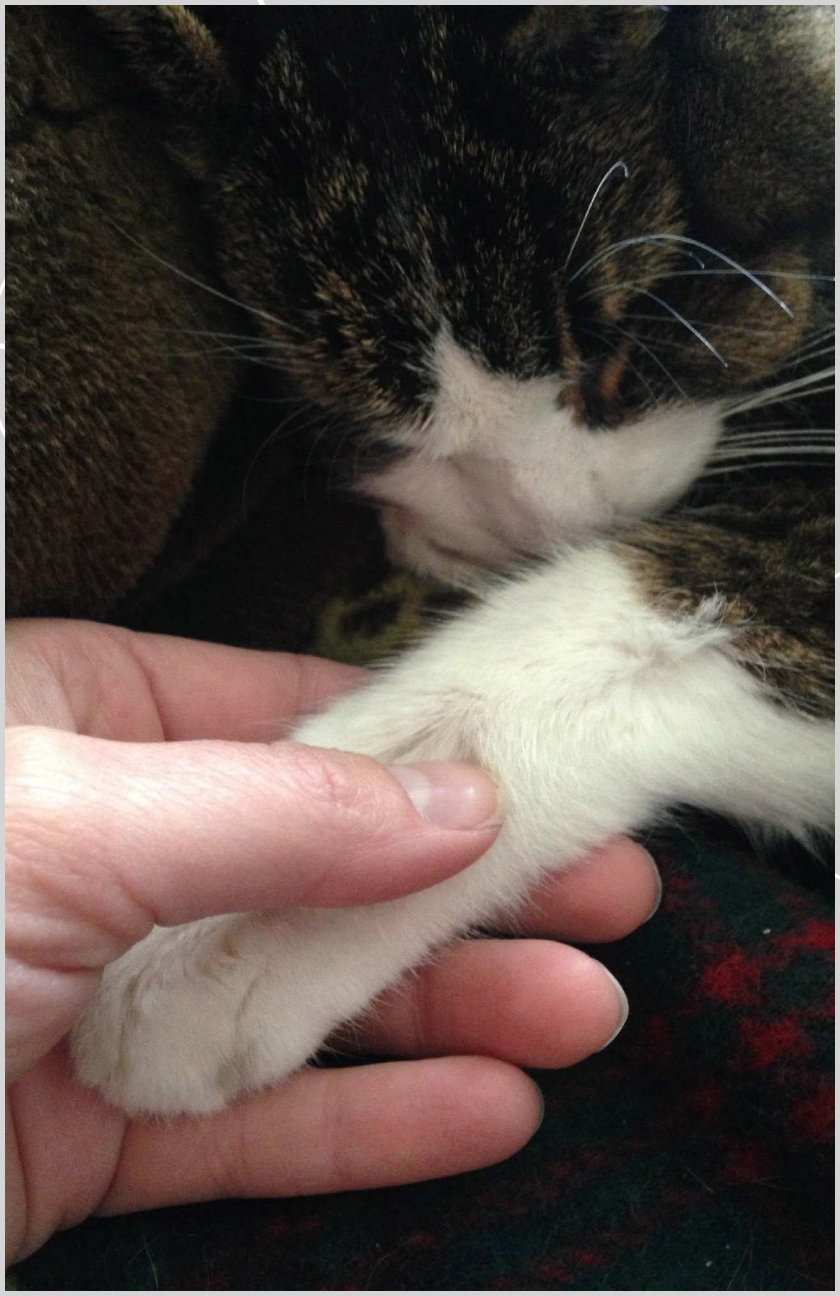


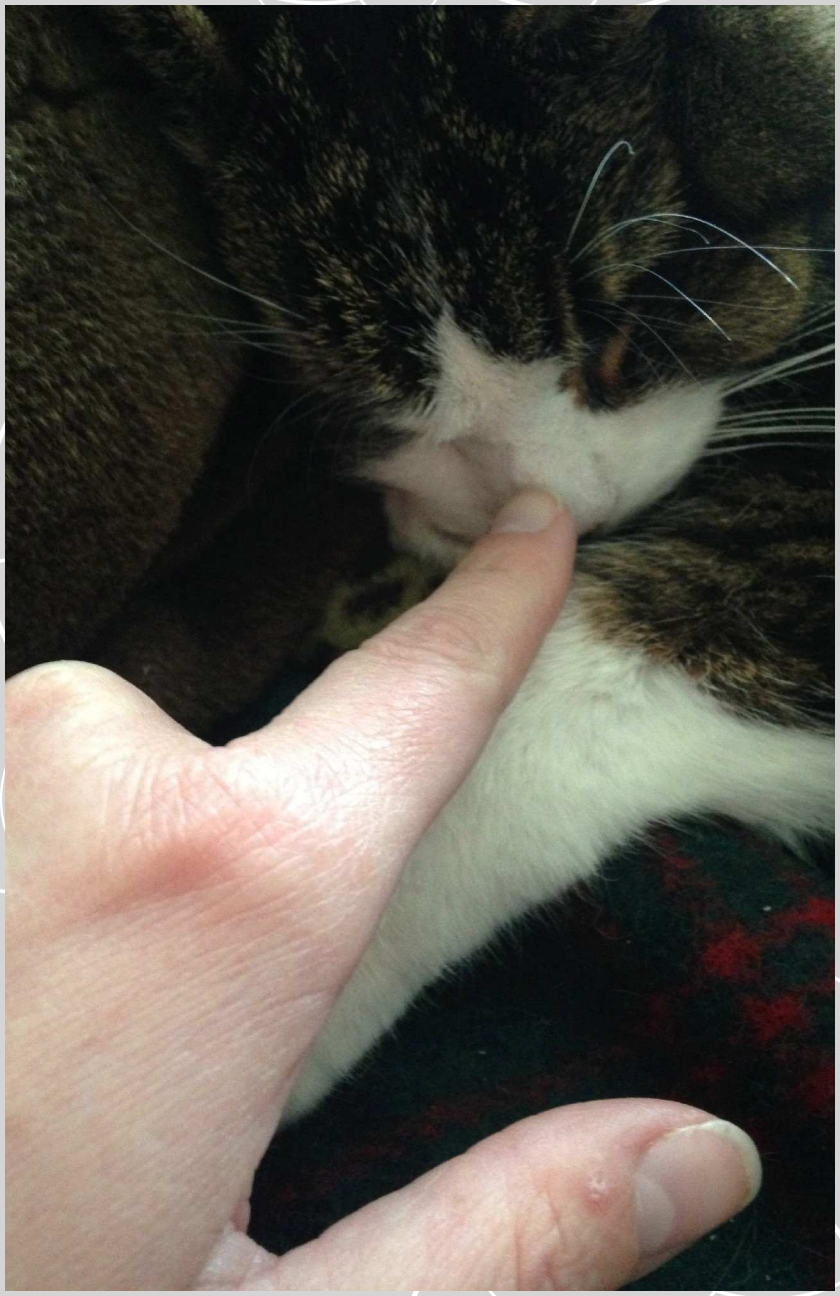






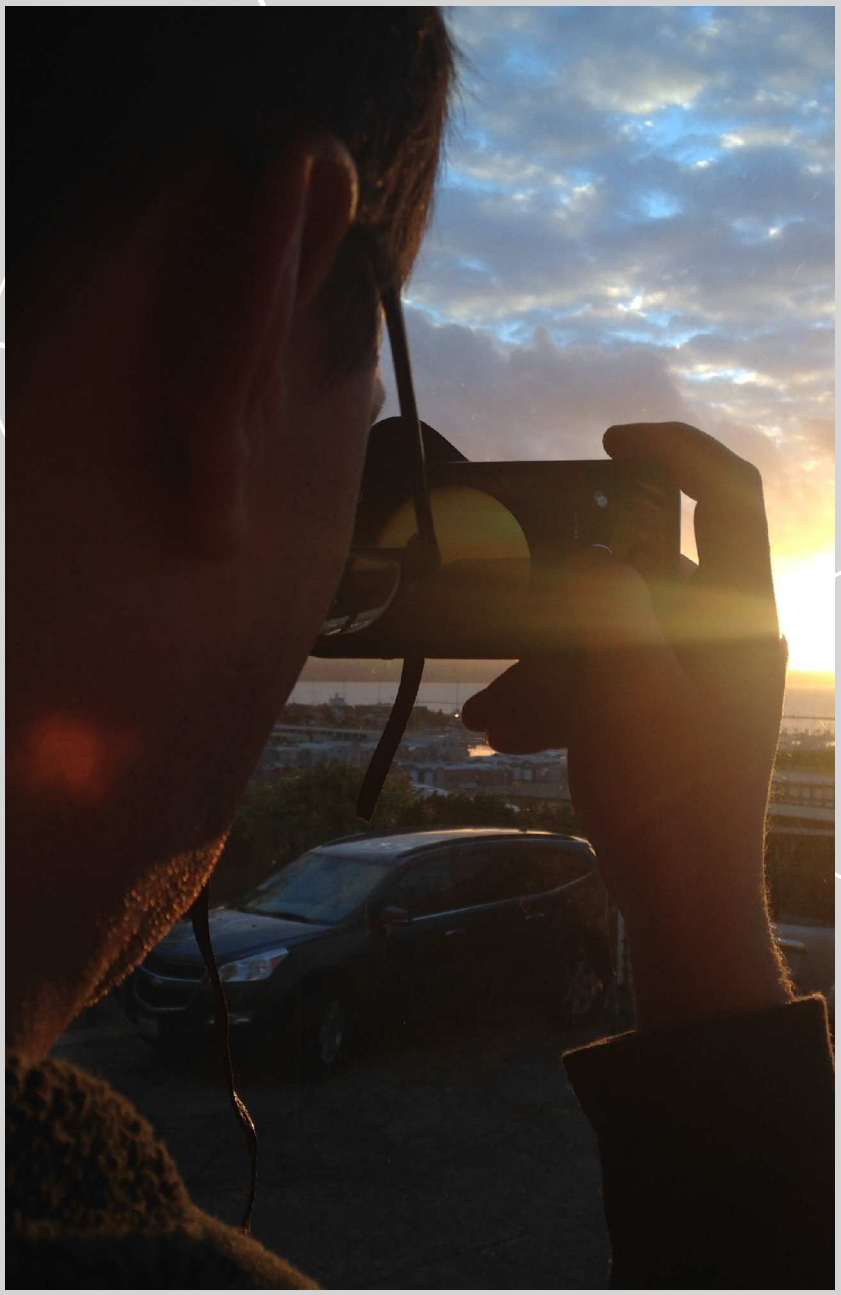


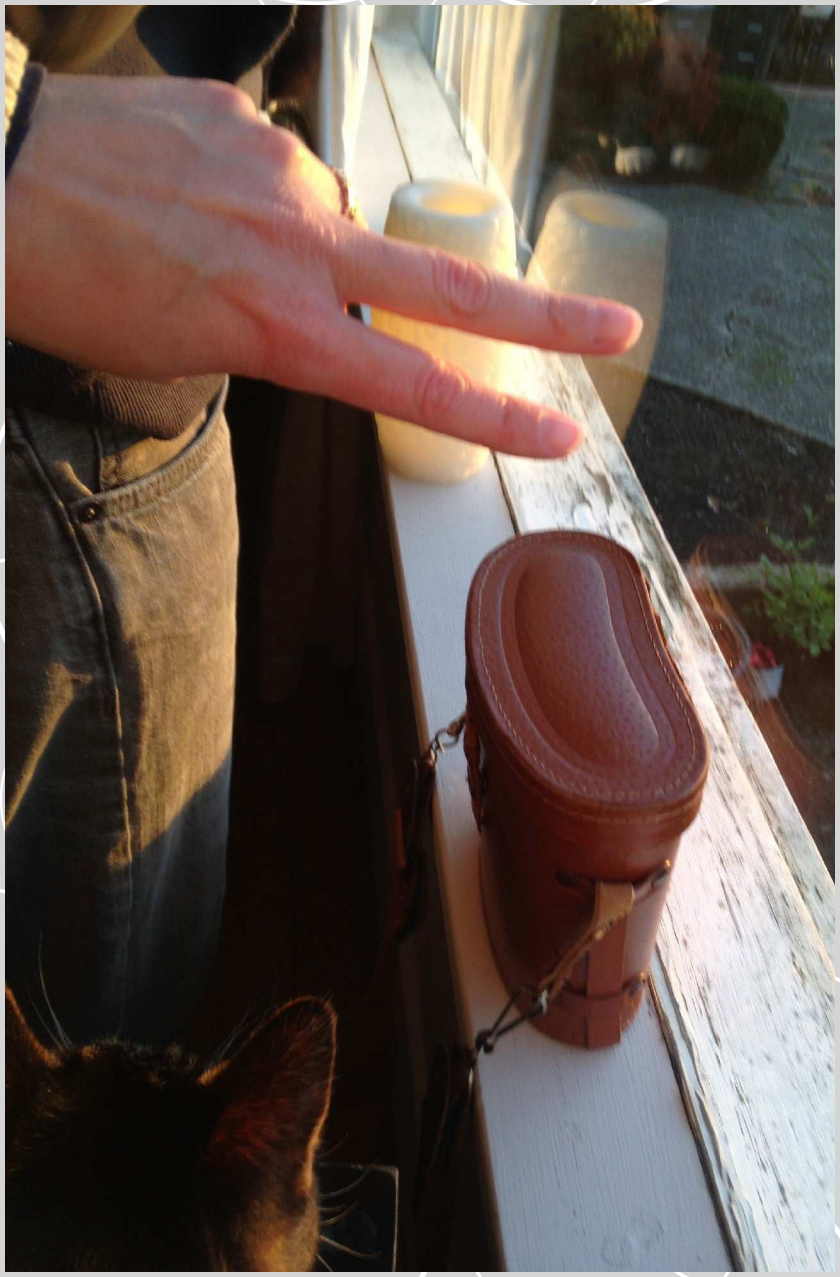




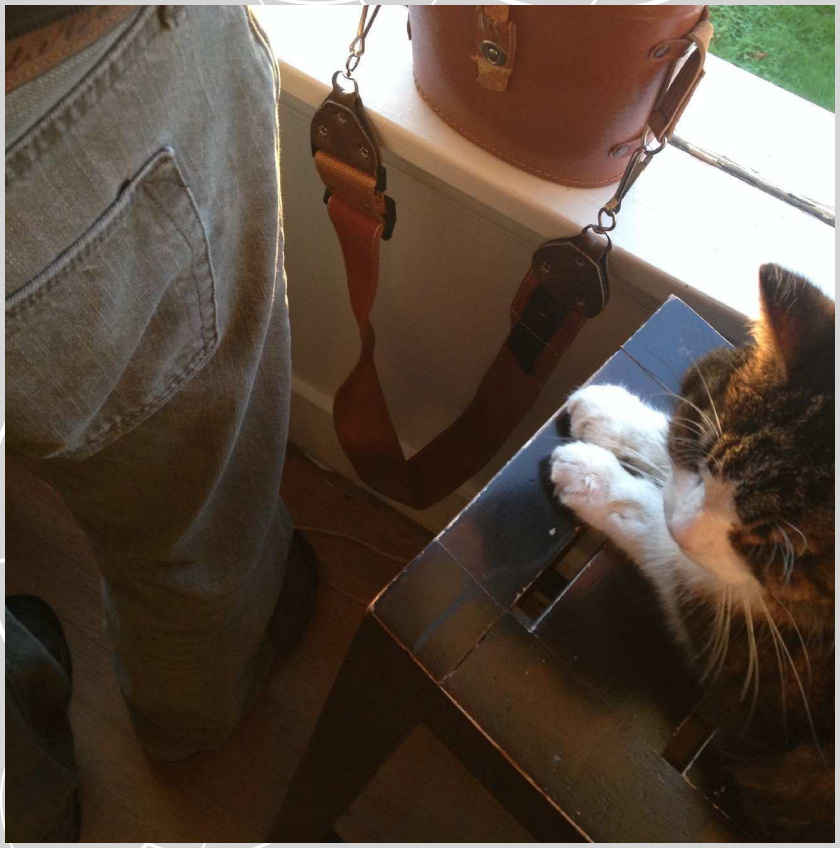
My Sweet Pea

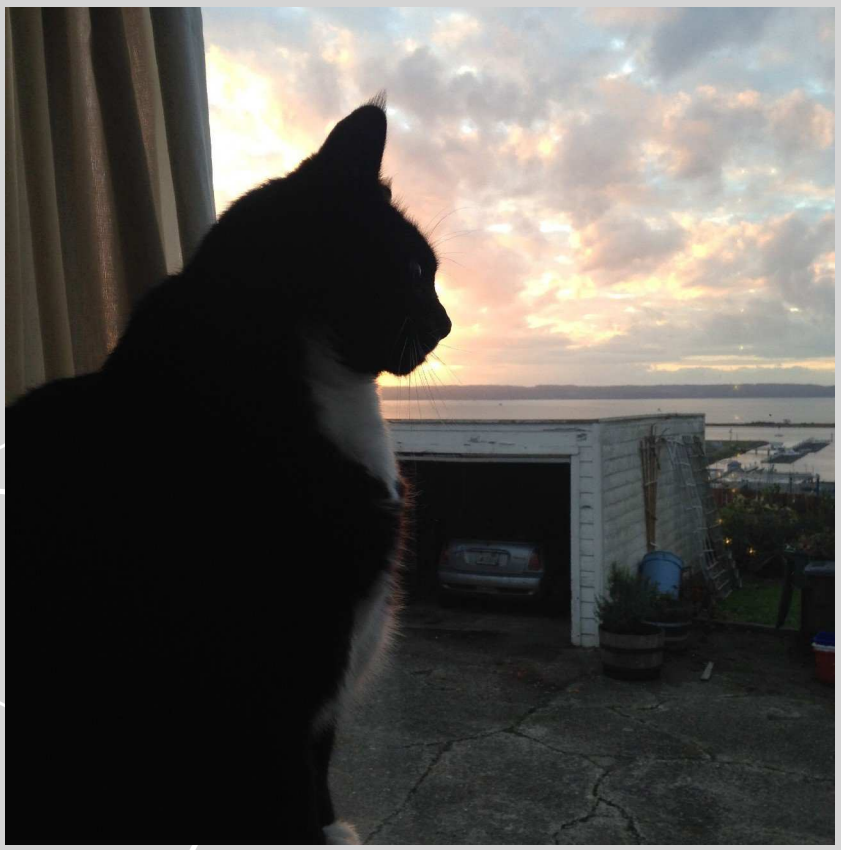
I tweeted out this photo on Friday the 15th before she passed away and mentioned @NPCA. On Monday, after she was gone, she lived on in several retweets and favorites of this image.
=^.^=





Part of the joy of moving back into the Everett house was to be able to witness some of the most amazing sunsets in the world. On the next page is one of the last images I took of Speckie in the glow of an Everett sunset on Saturday the 16th.



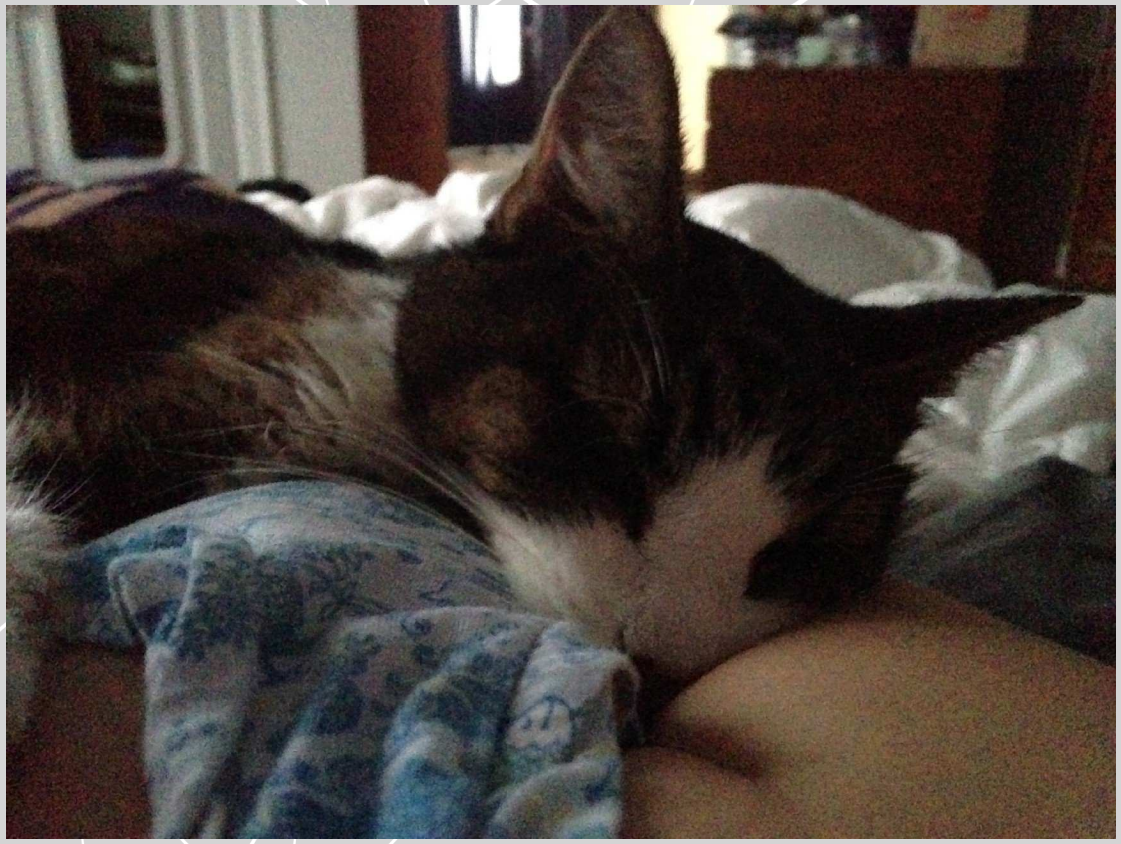


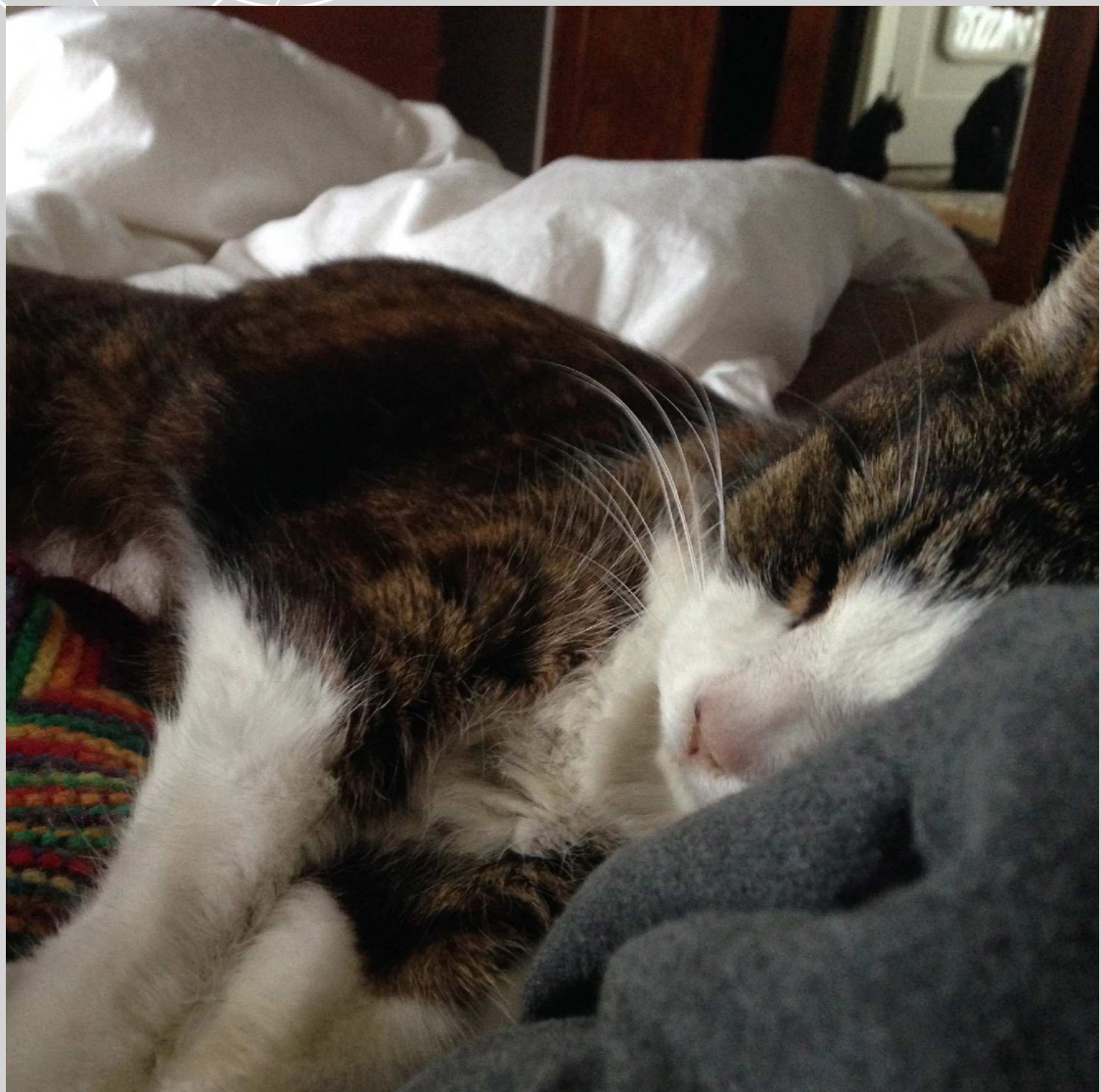
At some point in the middle of her last night she had fallen from the edge of the bed in her attempt to walk somewhere. The strength just wasn't there. I placed her in the middle between Oliver and me, just like a little child. We woke up on Sunday, November 17th with my girl between us. When I went downstairs, I took her with me and we enjoyed several hours of lap / couch time together.

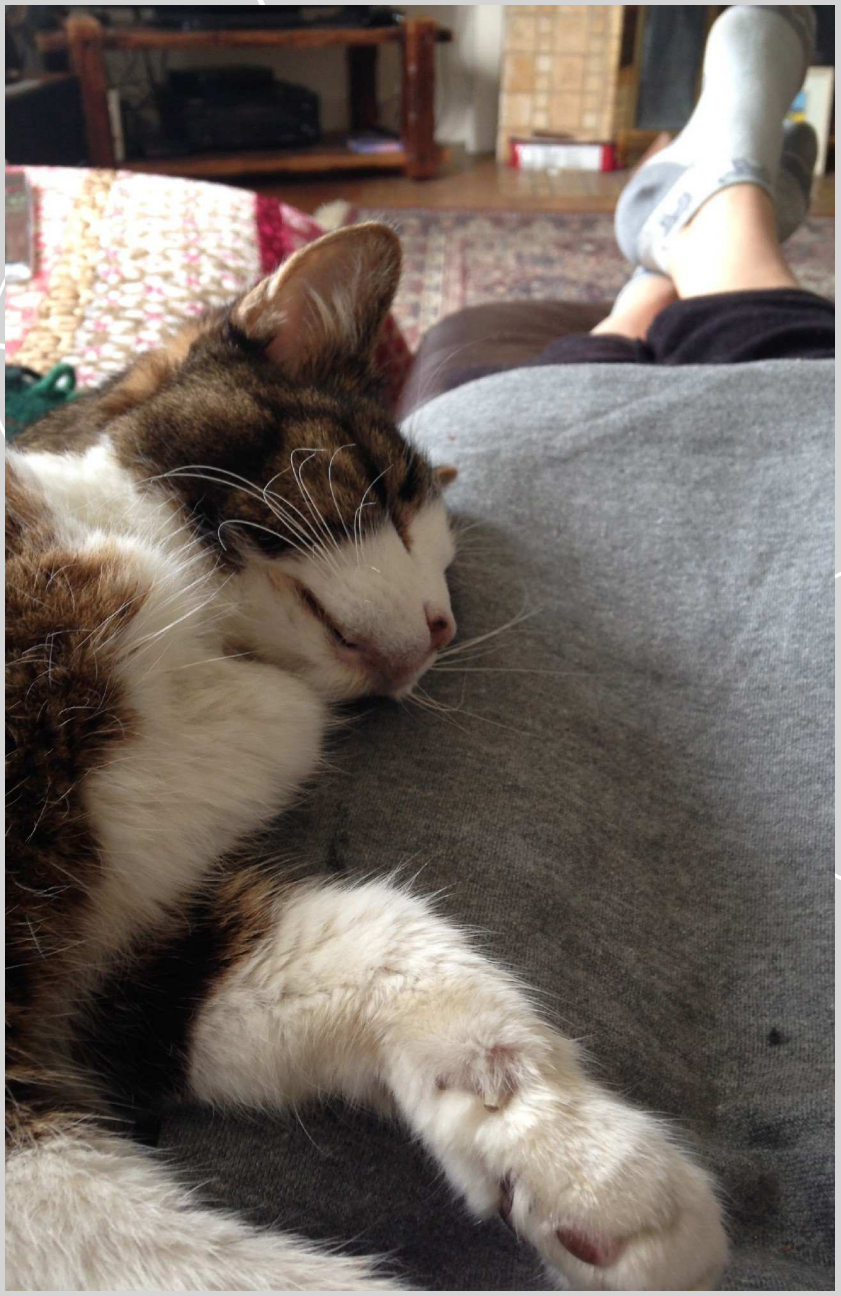
Around 4pm, she began to shake her head quite often, and as I learned later, she was having mini-strokes, and I placed her on the living room rug. Oliver came upstairs after working in the basement. Speck's breathing was different and we stayed next to her, crying and saying how much we loved her, until she passed on her own, knowing we were right there with her to say goodbye.

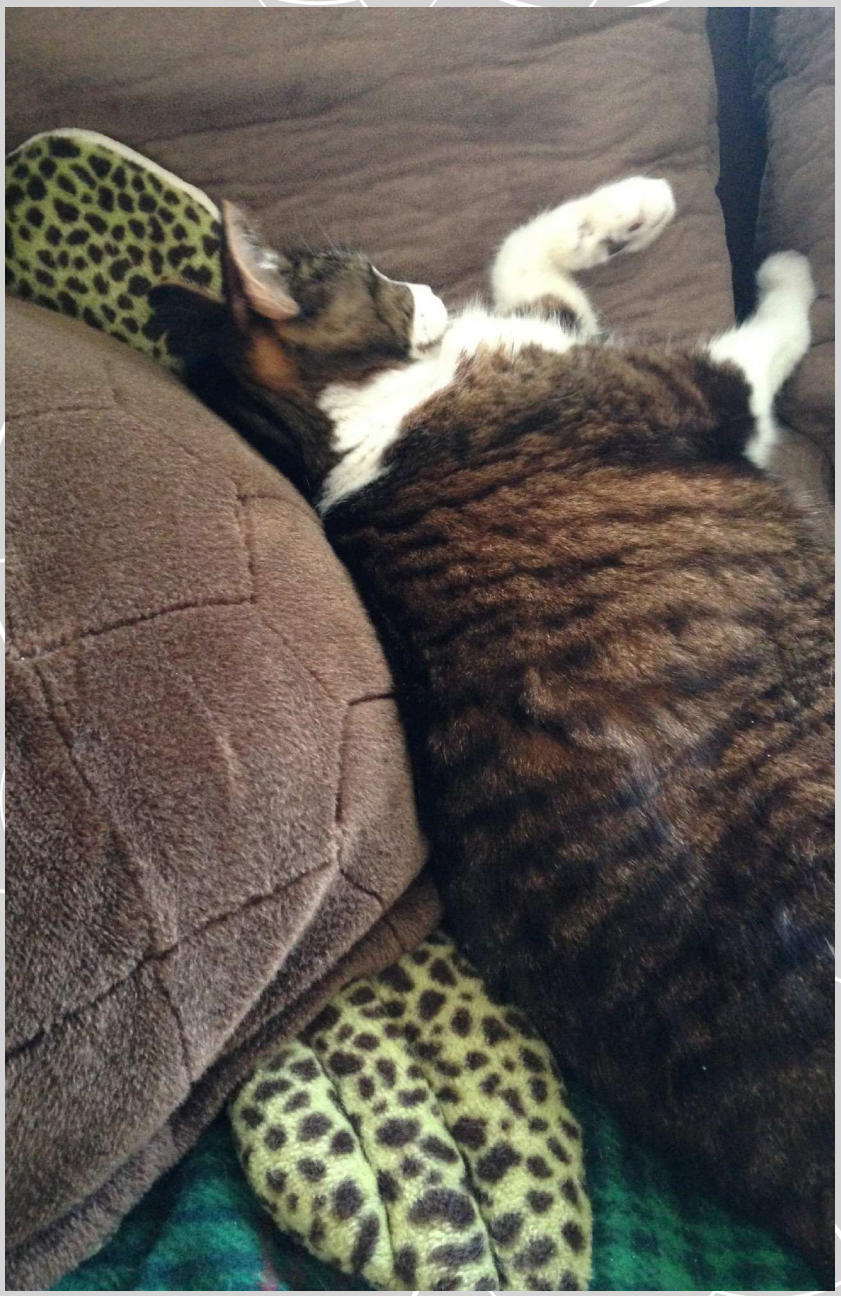
It so made me think of George. And, of all days, November 17th is my mom's birthday. In 2013, she would have been 73 years old. Speckie was just 13, and she was gone. My baby girl was gone.

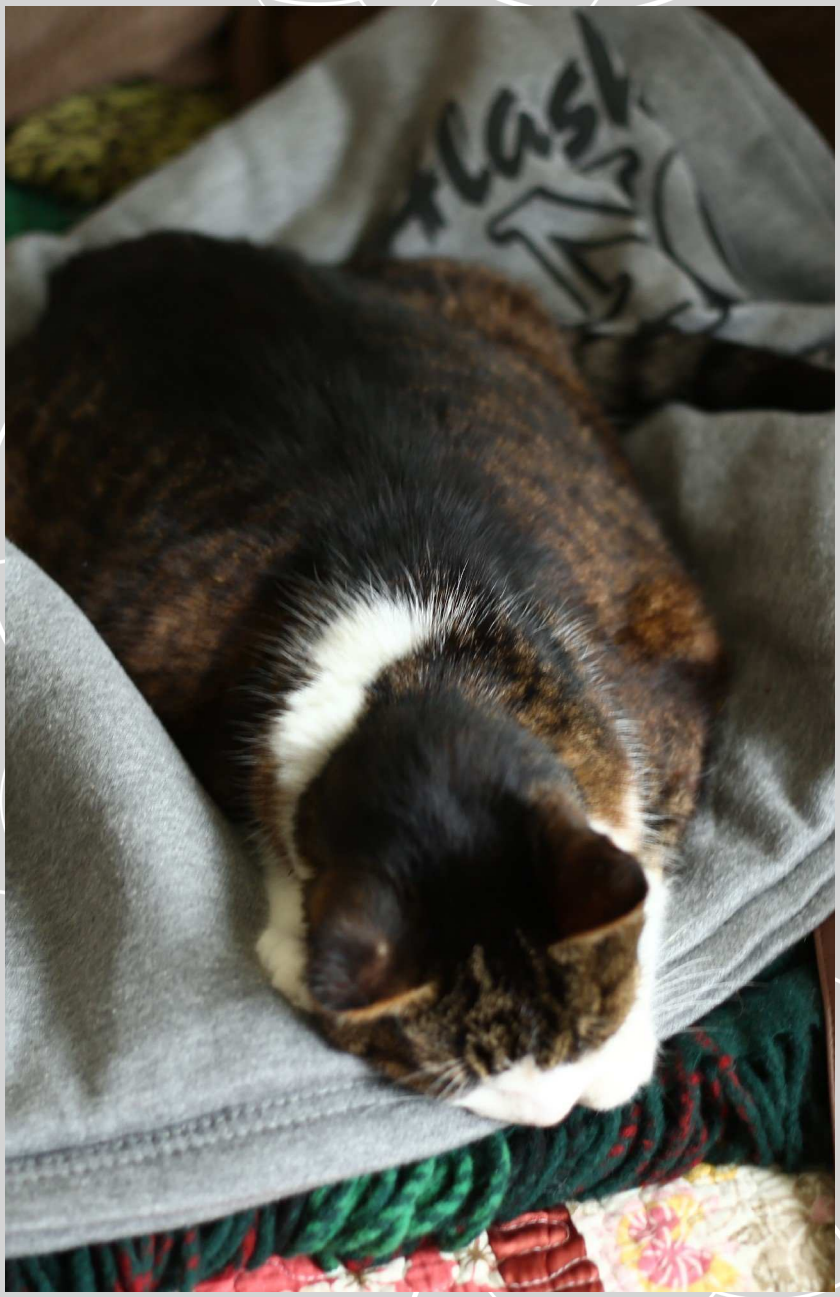
On the next few pages are photographs I took on the day she died.



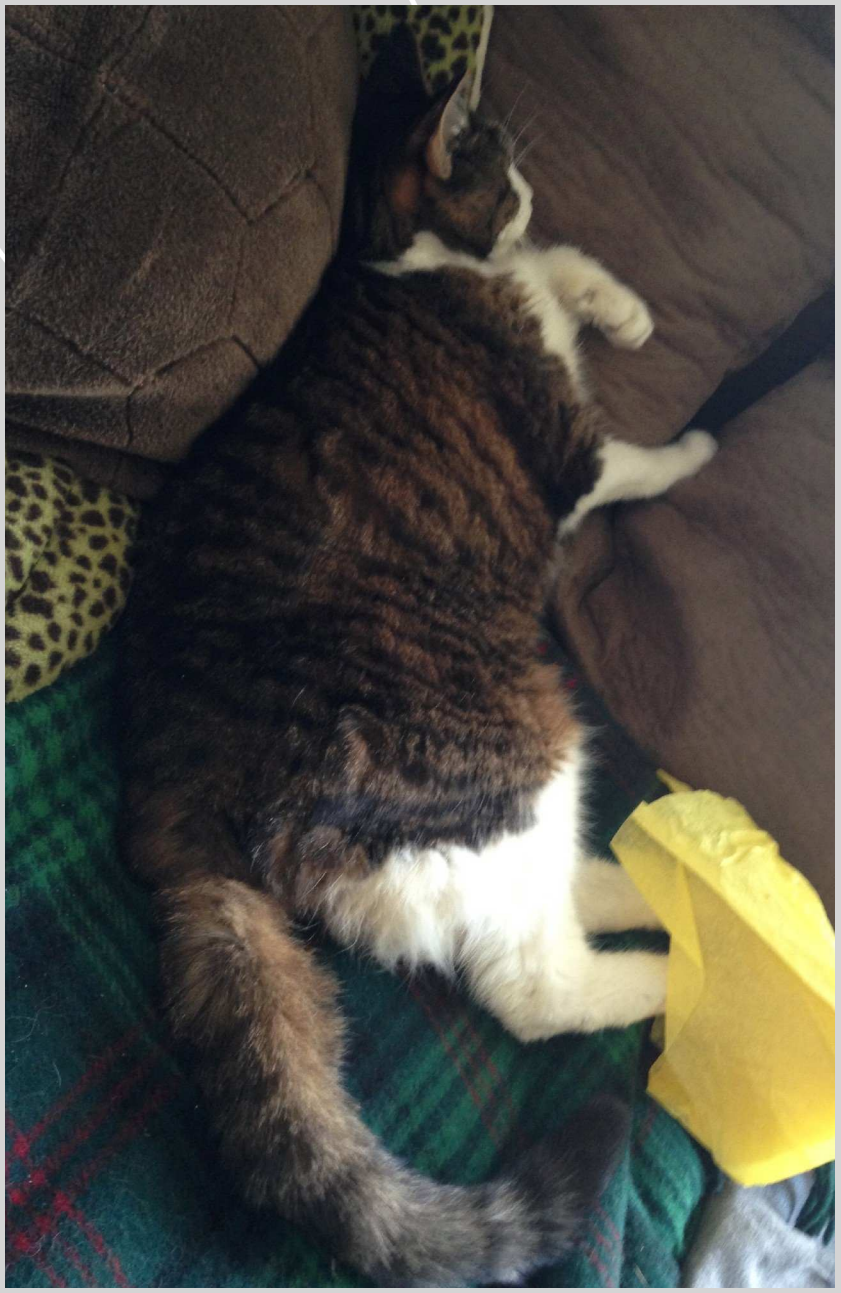


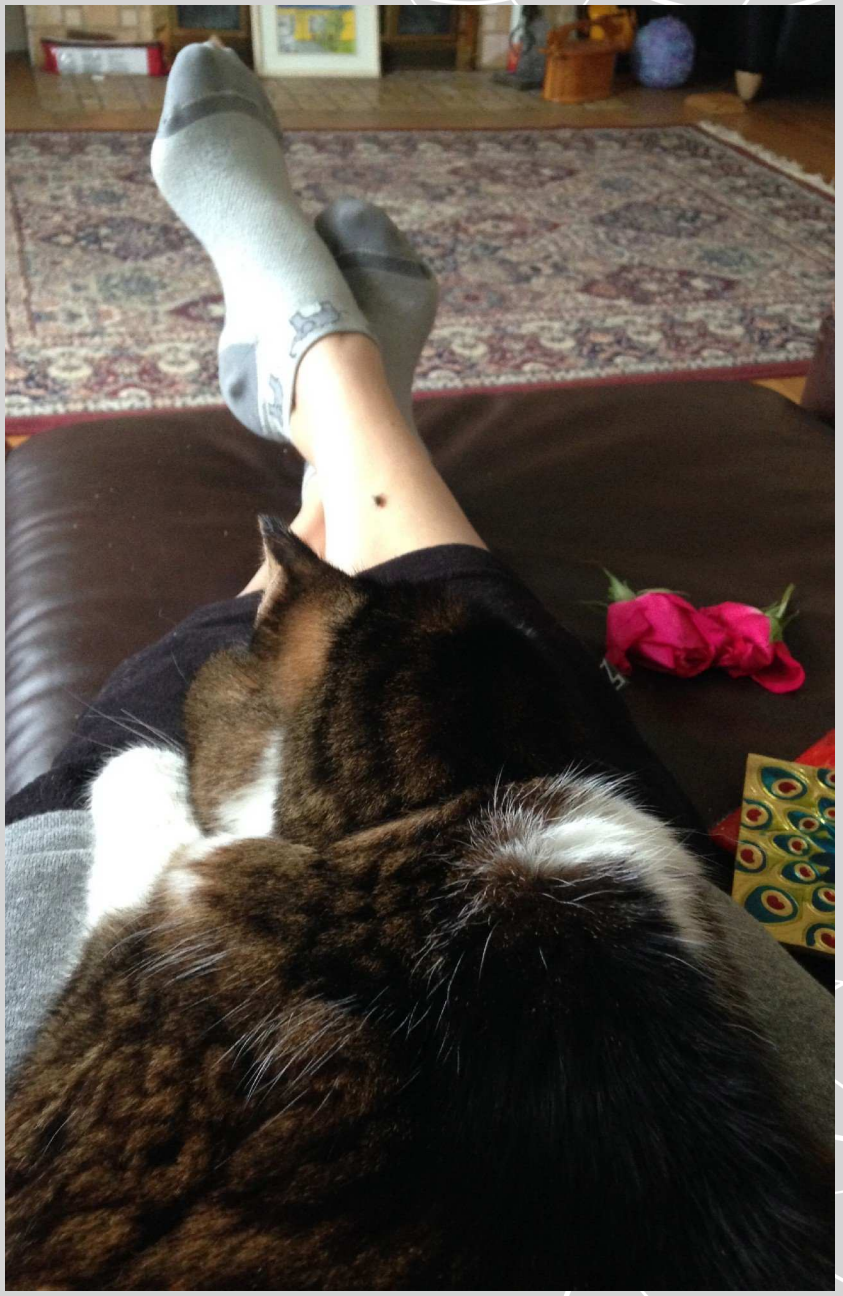




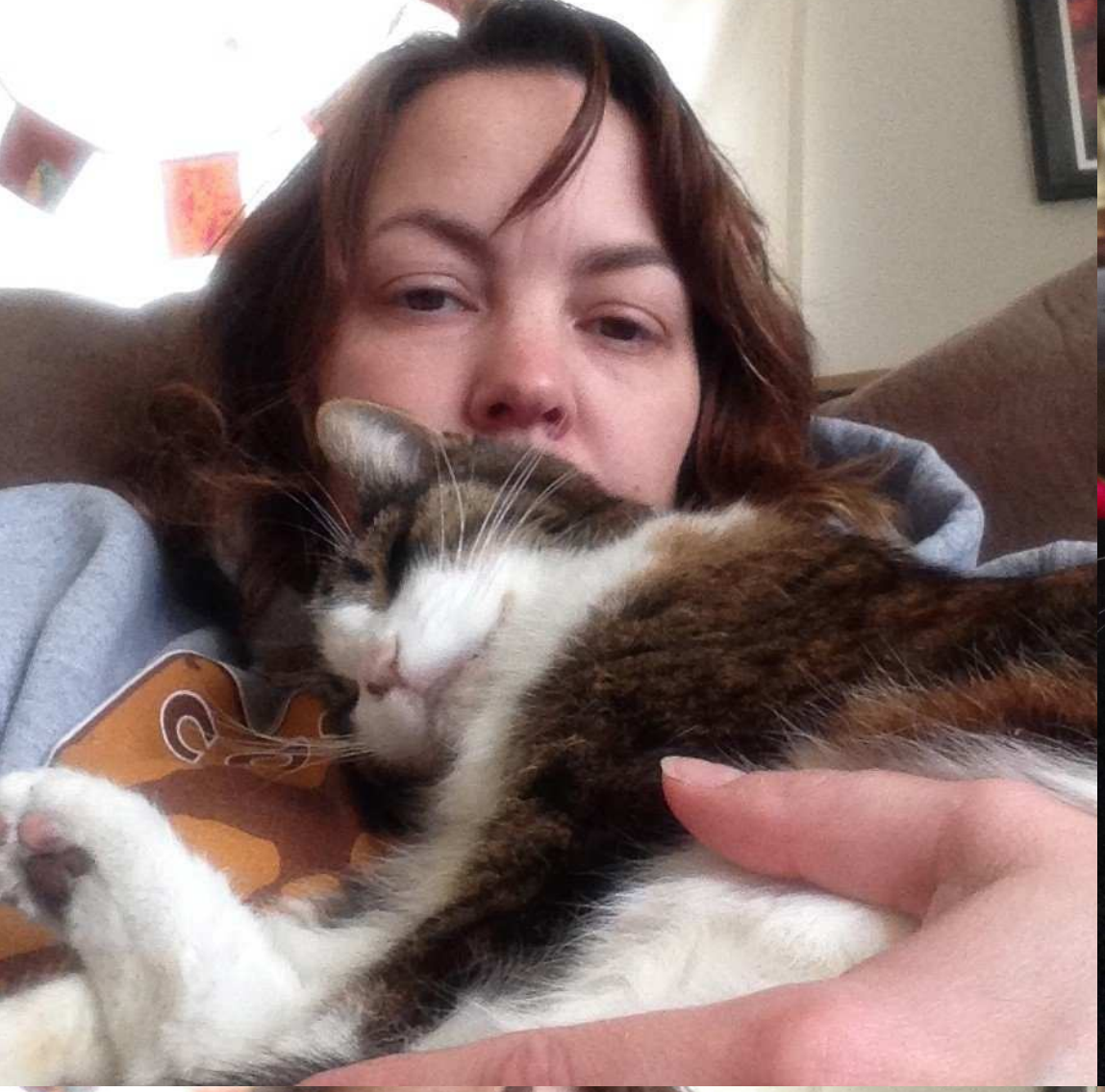


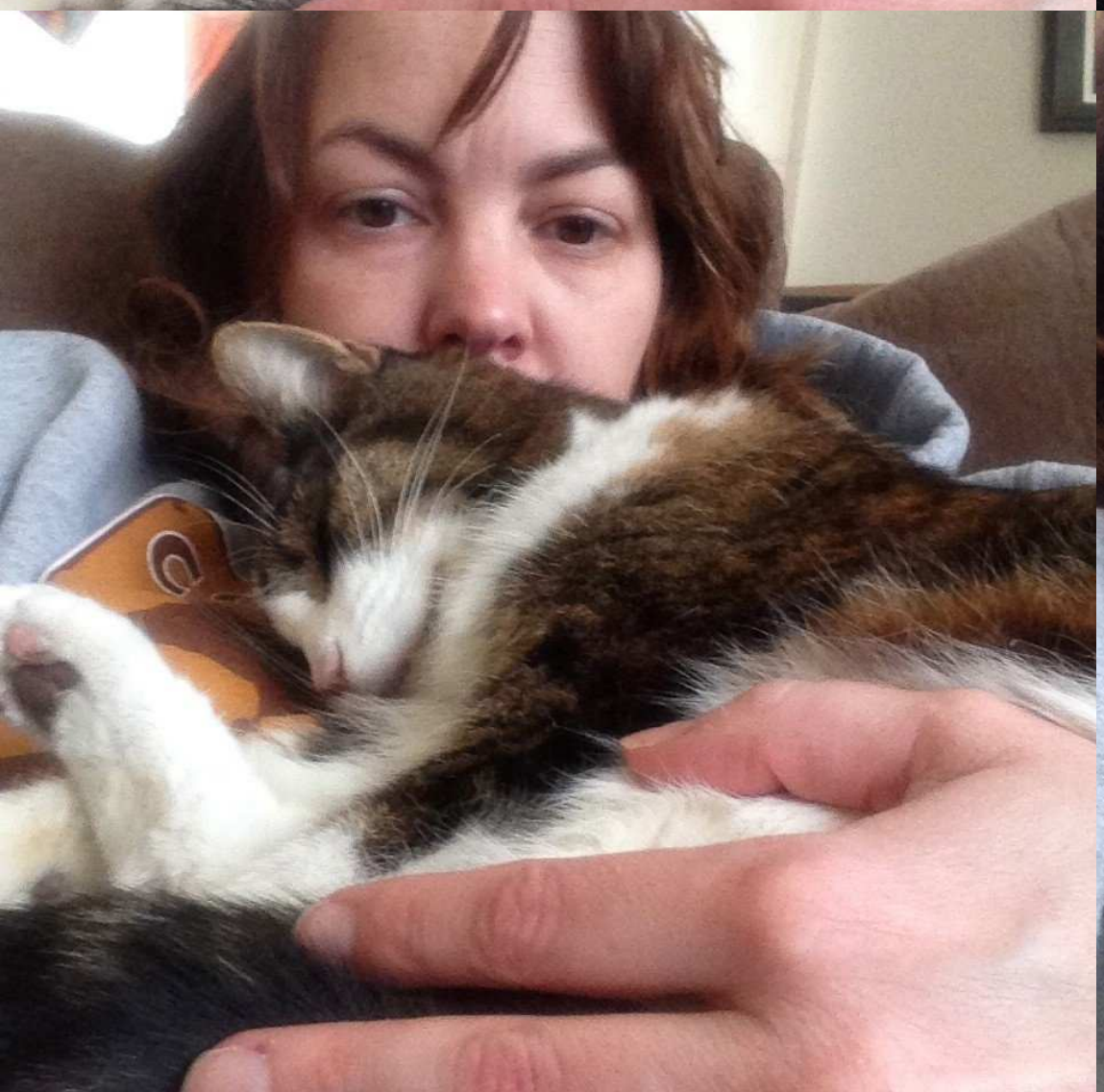
Speck =^.^=

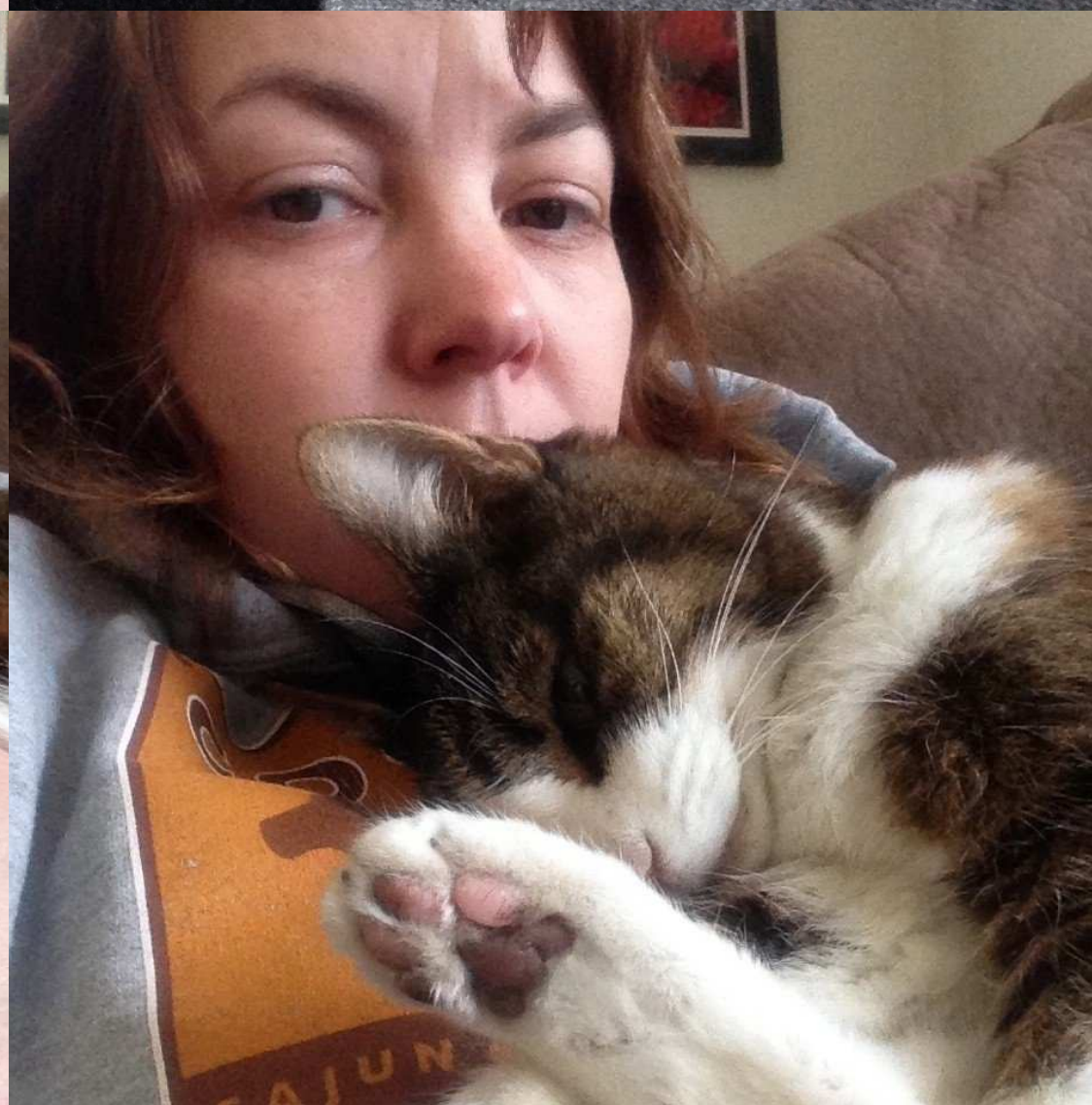




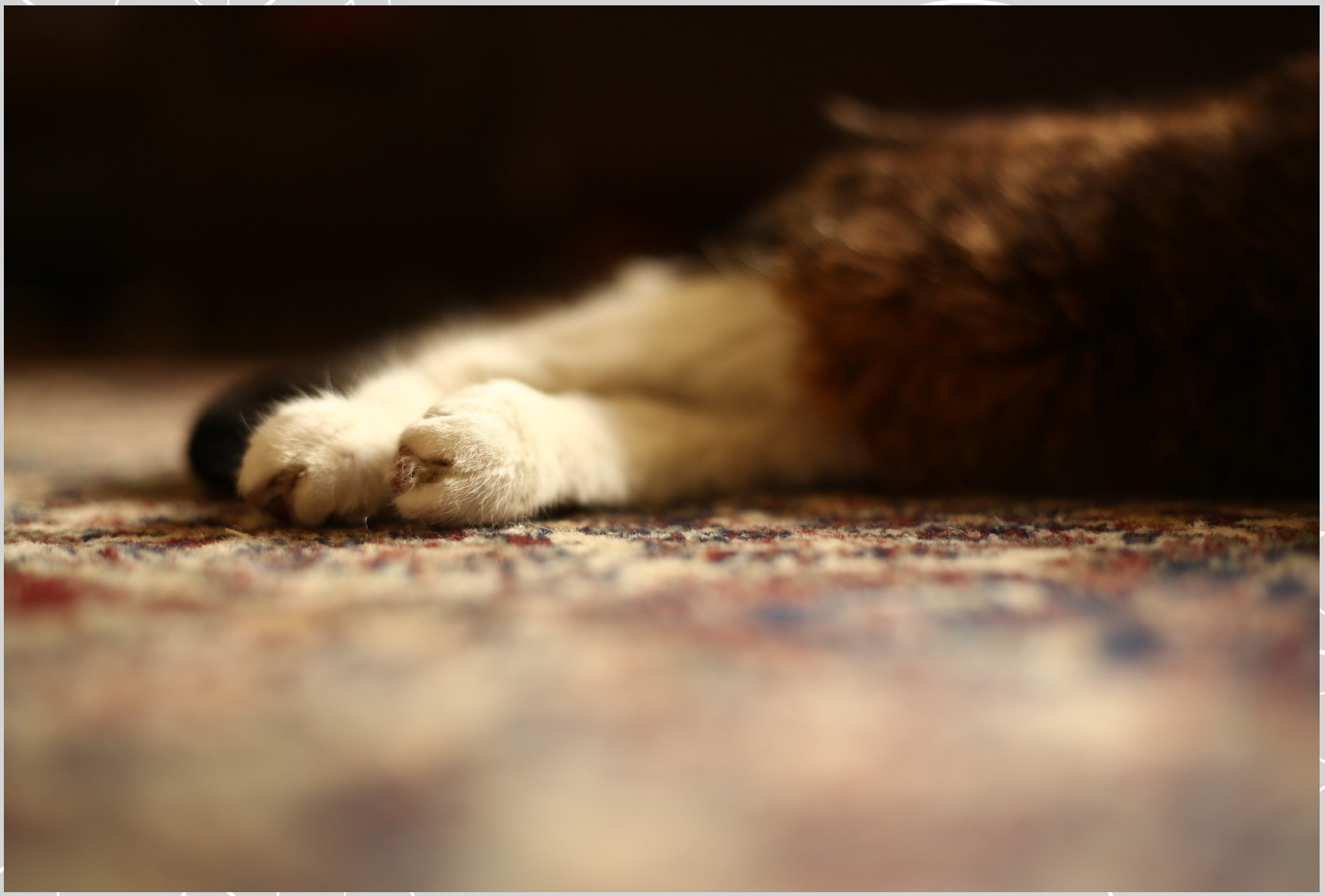
Whether it's the same fly or not, I'll never know, but in the last day or two of Speck's life, this fly would hang out on me when she was with me. You can see it on my shin. It's on my arm a few pages back.

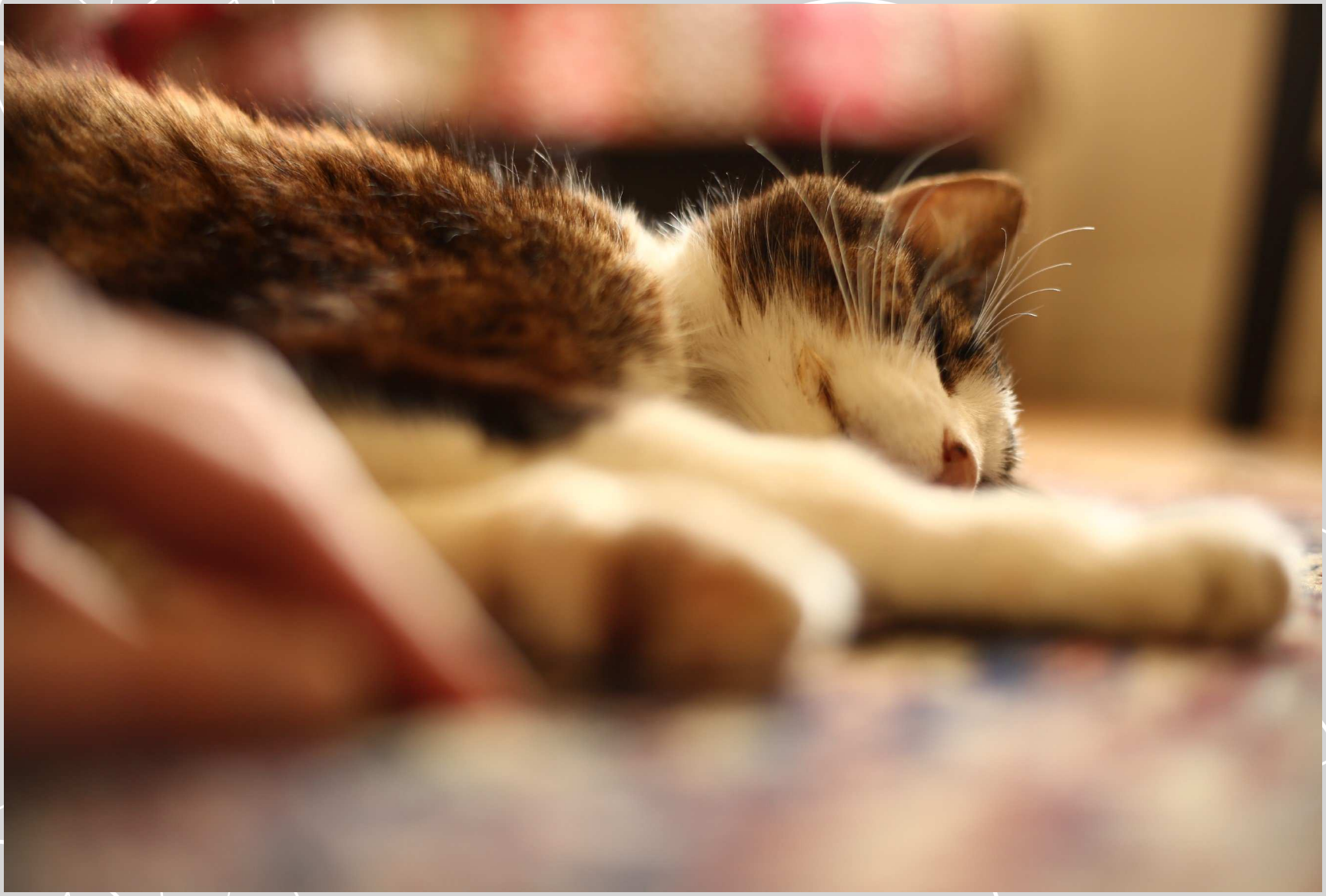


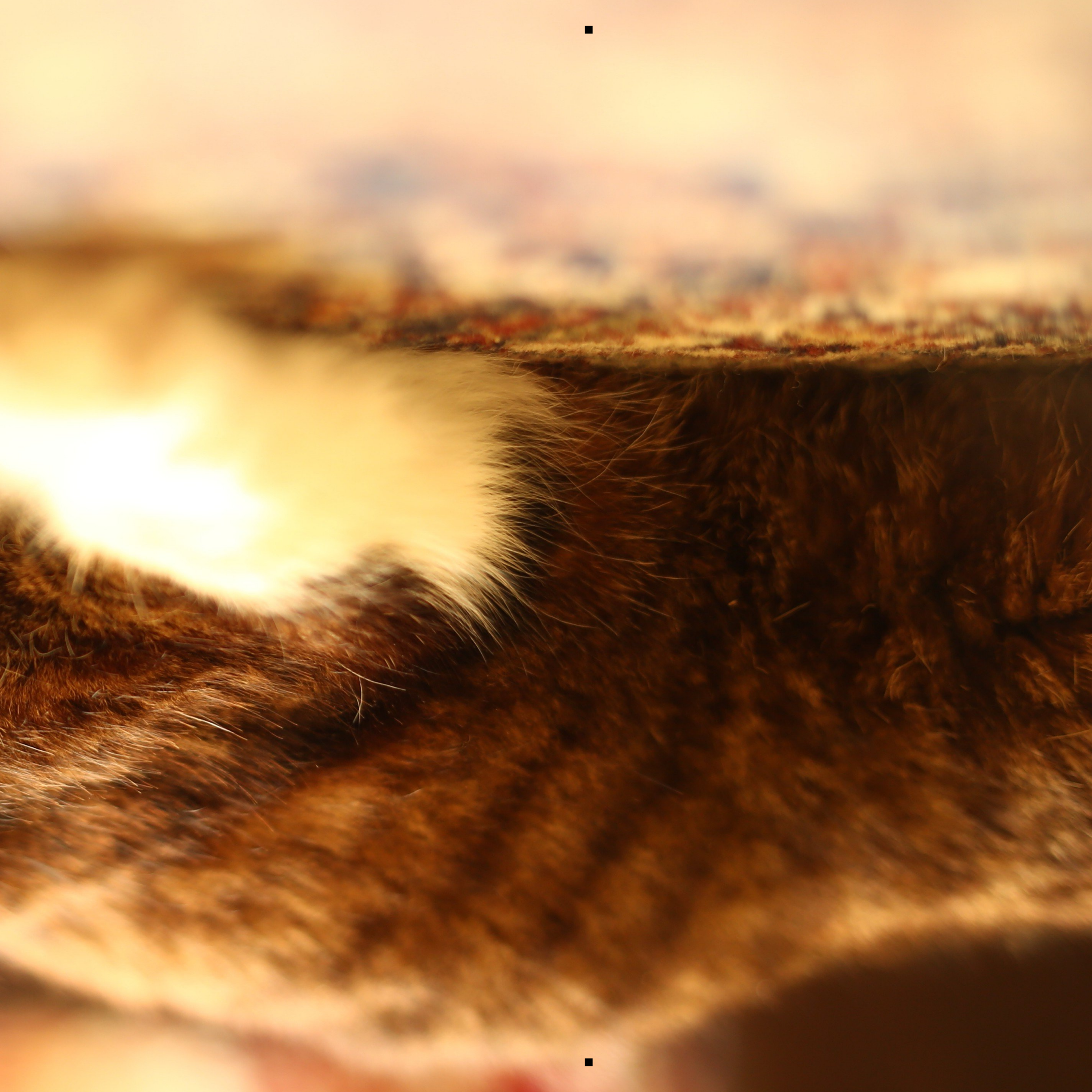




Speck =^.^=





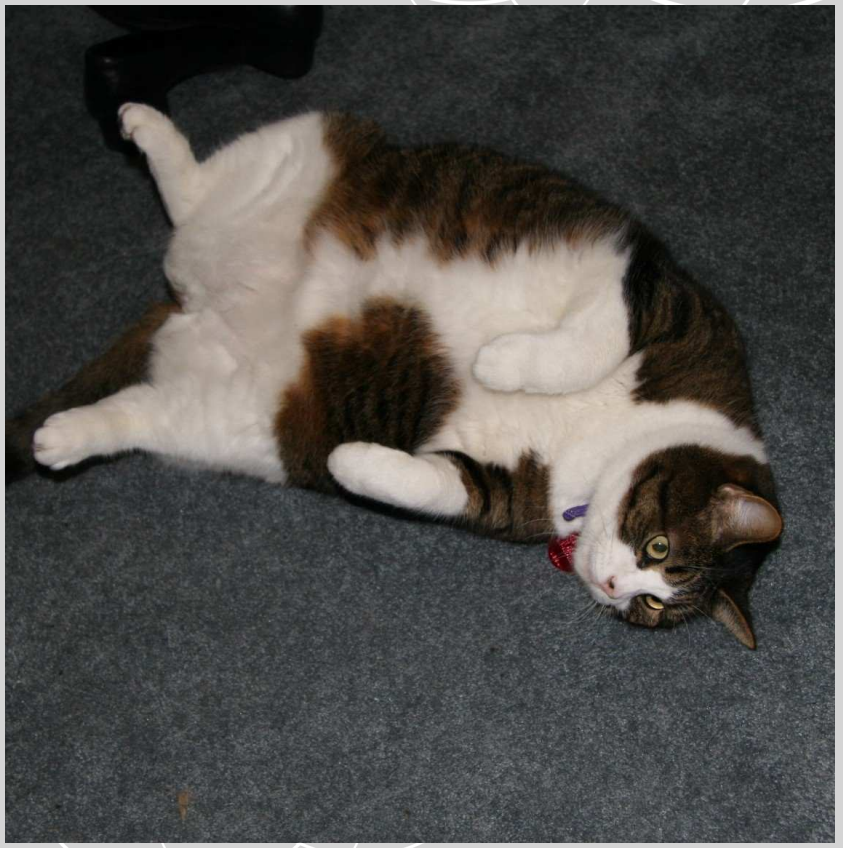


After she passed, we stayed with her for a while. We cried. Bitches came up to sniff. And then, we prepared her to be tanned. I know it sounds weird, but after being at the Sitka Tribal Tannery during ATIA, I had thought about keeping some of Speck's fur. We always joked that it was like 600 thread count. Oh so soft! It seemed a shame to waste it in burial or cremation. In December, we sent her to Promised Land Tannery, and eventually we'll have a rectangle of her fur to love when we miss her.

In the meantime, I have transferred my active kitty love to Bitches, Oliver's cat, and I'm so very grateful that we still have her.

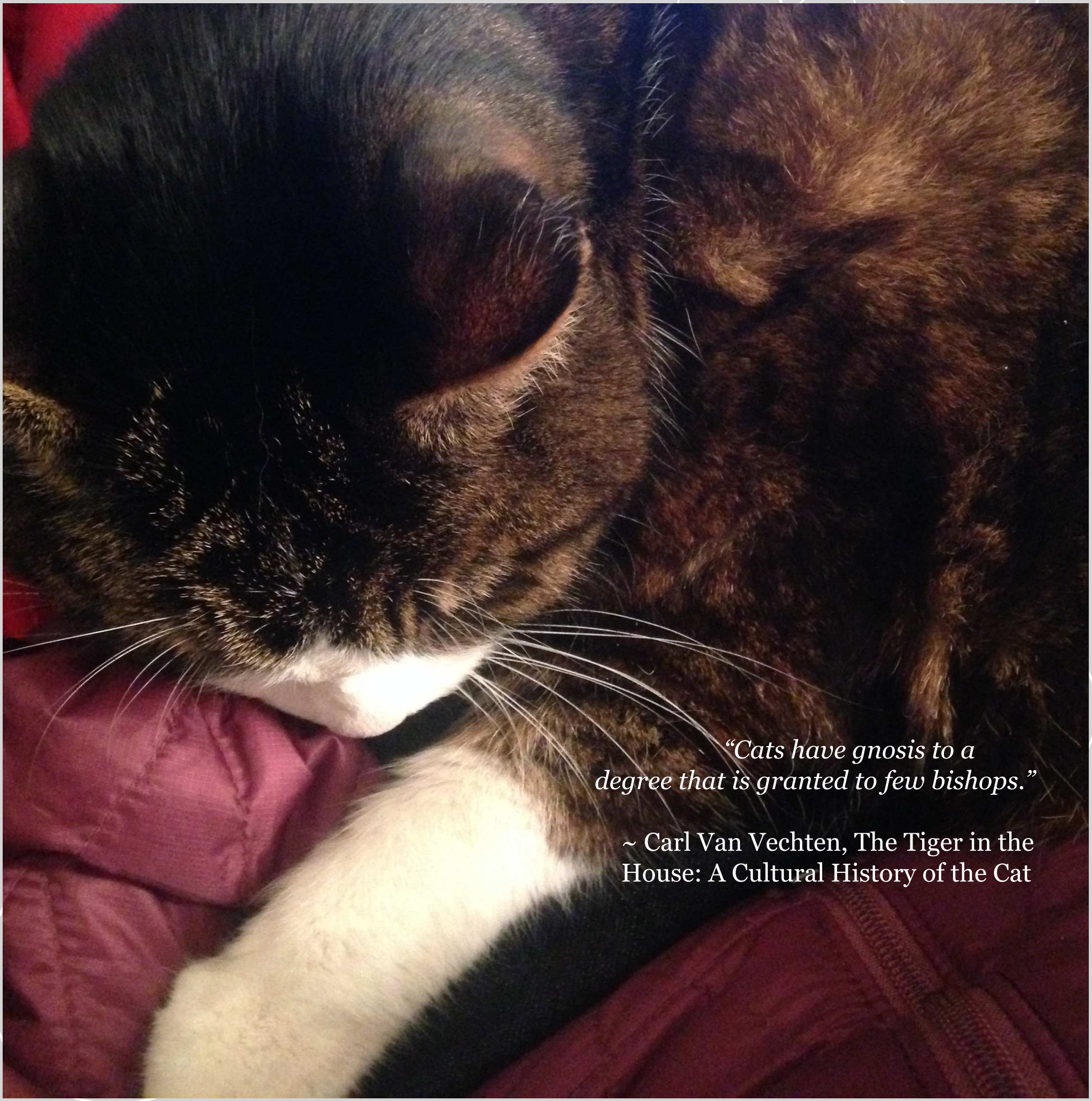
I love cats. I've always loved them. Speck was a special cat. She's one that I will always remember and I'm so grateful that she lived with me. I miss her every day. I keep expecting that she'll be in her favorite chair. That she'll meow for food. That she'll want to go outside to do her thing.

I've been assured, and believe, that she was greeted at the Rainbow Bridge by



a long line up of my favorite four legged friends of days gone by - Allie, Cecil, Bibby, Jaz, Pete, Indy, Pepper, Peter, Scar, Yoda and more. I'm sure that she'd be a welcomed and cheerful member of the team.

Rest in peace, sweet kitten. You were loved. And, we know in our hearts, that you loved us back. Thanks for that.


“Cats have gnosis to a degree that is granted to few bishops.”
~ Carl Van Vechten, The Tiger in the House: A Cultural History of the Cat

blurb