

Preface



Q-Tip and Rosie

I DIDN'T SET OUT TO BECOME a friend to twenty-three homeless cats, but the 9,000-year-old bond between felines and humans is irresistible. As my sweetheart, Steve, has said to me on many occasions, "You can't help yourself; you have no boundaries when it comes to cats." He's right.

It all started when I met Nick Manelli over a decade ago at a small lake near my home in Northern California. I saw him feeding a few cats, and soon I, too, slipped into the role of cat caretaker. What I didn't know then was that the cats would in time take care of me.



Some people use the word “feral” to describe the cats you will meet in this book, but I think these cats would agree with me in telling you that this term is misleading and slightly insulting. “Feral” implies a dangerous wildness, a concept which I’m afraid leads some humans to regard them as unworthy of love, impossible to socialize, even crazy and menacing. With a few exceptions, this has not been my experience. Like all other beings, when they are shown kindness, respect and love, cats demonstrate an amazing capacity to form friendships, not only with their fellow cats but with those who care for them.

I’ve loved cats for as long as I can remember. When I was growing up in a small town in the Midwest, we always had a cat which even my father enjoyed, more so it seemed than he enjoyed his own children. By some weird kind of algebra I think I calculated that if my father loved our cat, and our cat loved my father, and I loved our cat then, well, you get the picture. It didn’t work out as I had wanted, but the cat was always content to absorb our love, no matter what.

Several years ago I was in a car accident that left me in constant pain. Three years later I had surgery to remove the source of the pain—a disc in my neck that had been damaged in the accident. That same year, I had emergency surgery on my heart. In spite of the ongoing pain and exhaustion, I quickly returned to work after each hospitalization, but after subsequent years of deteriorating health, I was compelled to quit. Soon after, I started to write.



I didn't know it when I began, but caring for the cats at the lake has evolved into a life- and soul-saving ritual. Without the daily sense of purpose and accomplishment that a regular job can provide, I felt unproductive and useless. The friendship, love and fun that the cats supplied gave me a reason to make myself get out of bed even when I didn't feel like it, even when I had so much pain I didn't think I could move. Even in the rain.

I hope that by reading this book you might be inspired to make friends with your neighborhood homeless cats. They're waiting for your love, and they're more than happy to repay you with theirs.

Here now, I'd like to introduce you to some of my feline friends who live in a place known as Buster Hollow.