Spell out your wishes when choosing a caretaker for your cat.
Choose Your Cat’s Godparents

BY PATRICIA FRY

PLAN NOW TO ENSURE YOUR FELINE FRIEND WILL RECEIVE LOVE AND CARE IF SOMETHING SHOULD HAPPEN TO YOU.

Cherish was a contented 10-year-old Siamese mix who, on bright days, loved lying in a shard of sunlight and who couldn’t resist “helping” when her cat parent, Sarah, sat down to crochet. Life for Cherish was good until... one day, Sarah didn’t come home to fix his dinner. She wasn’t there at bedtime. In fact, no one came around until a few days later.

Cherish recognized the man who lured him into a carrier and carted him off to a new place filled with cats in cages — some of them meowing and some crouching behind their litterboxes. If Cherish could communicate with the others, he would learn that many of them were there because their caretakers had become ill or died. Now they were all just waiting.

Cherish was lucky. He didn’t have to wait long. Soon, he was in a new home and loved by a new family.

Think Ahead

An estimated 500,000 pets wind up in shelters each year when their pet parents become ill or die.

If you’ve loved cats for a long time, you’ve probably experienced at least one heartbreakingly goodbye. You’ve probably witnessed a beloved furr friend cross over the rainbow bridge. But have you ever thought about what would become of your cats should something happen to you? Who will feed them, give them a warm place to sleep and love them? More and more cat parents of all ages are making plans for the care of their tabbies, torties and Himmies should their cats outlive them.

Elaine Viets of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., has made provisions for her cats should she go before 7-year-old Harry and 11-year-old Mystery. “I had a serious health scare some years ago and I worried that, if something happened to both my husband and me, we’d need someone to take good care of the cats,” she says. She thought about her friends and ultimately chose people whom she’s known for years and who have the same care standards for their own pets.

For example, Viets wants her two cats to remain together. “They’re good friends, and it would be cruel to separate them,” she says.

Marci Kladnik of Los Angeles agrees. When she set up her trust, which included provisions for her pets, she stressed, “The bonds of friendship must be honored.” In Kladnik’s case, she can rely on her two daughters to respect her final wishes for her pets. “They both love animals, know my pets and know how I feel about their welfare,” she says.

Nonetheless, she has spelled out her wishes: “Barney, a formerly feral kitten I trapped, imprintioned on my dog. This couple must stay together. Two other cats cuddle and should remain together. The fourth cat is more of a loner and could be adopted out as a single or stay with either of the pairs.”

But circumstances can change. That’s why Ramona Marek of Vancouver, Wash., has a Plan A, B and C for the care of her two cats. She says, “If someone retires, sells their house and wants to travel, I don’t want them to feel obligated, pressured or guilted into taking my cats. By my having alternative plans, they can choose to decline the godparent role.”

Kladnik is also thinking ahead. “I have spoken with both of my daughters and also stipulated in my living trust...
When choosing a caretaker for your cat, take certain situations into consideration — like whether the new home has children.

For more information on 2nd Chance 4 Pets, visit www.2ndchance4pets.org.

that, in the event that neither of them are in a position to care for my pets, they are instructed to find an appropriate adopter or, as a last resort, a no-cage facility in which to place them," she says.

Make Your Wishes Known

How do you arrange for your pet’s ongoing care? Most people simply have their attorneys include provisions for their pets as part of their living trust. But it is also important to speak with your chosen caretaker to make sure he or she can agree to your stipulations.

“I’ve spelled everything out in my will,” Viets explains. “I ask that the cats be kept indoors and that their claws not be removed except in a medical emergency. I also ask that the cat caregiver get a sum sufficient to pay for food and veterinary bills for five years. The costs of food and shelter prior to transporting [to a new home] and the transporting of the cats should be paid from my estate.”

Amy Shever is such a strong advocate for the continuing care of orphaned pets that in 2003 she established 2nd Chance 4 Pets, which helps pet parents plan for the possibility that their pets might outlive them. Based in Los Gatos, Calif., the national, all-volunteer advocacy group provides free online resources, including a pet-care instructions workbook, emergency ID cards, and information about other planning options such as animal sanctuaries, perpetual care programs and pet trusts.

My Own Story

Some years ago, I became a godparent. I took care of a neighbor’s four fur kids when she traveled. One day, Johanna said to me, “I’ve been thinking about what would happen to my cats should I die.” And she asked me to be their advocate.

I scoffed. Johanna was a fit and healthy 54-year-old. When I realized she was serious, of course I agreed, and I asked, “What are your wishes?”

She said, “I trust you to do what you think is best for them. I realize that you have four cats of your own and can’t take them in, but, I’ll leave money in an account to be transferred to you upon my death. Use it for their care until they find homes. If you have to put them in a rescue facility, donate the money to them.” A little over a year later, Johanna died of a brain aneurism.

I often wonder what would have happened to Lilly, Goldie, Nikki and Charlie if Johanna hadn’t thought ahead and planned for their future. As it turned out, these four charmers, who were already middle-aged, lived out their lives with people whose love took up where Johanna’s left off.

There are numerous ways to provide for your cats should something happen to you, including pet retirement homes and sanctuaries — some without cages. Barry Seltzer of Toronto and Professor Gerry W. Beyer of Lubbock, Texas, are estate planners and the authors of Fat Cats & Lucky Dogs: How To Leave (Some Of) Your Estate To Your Pet (2010, Prism Publishing Inc.). According to Seltzer, it’s important to know and understand your options and “plan in advance of disaster.”

What will become of your precious cats when you can no longer care for them? Whether you decide to consult with an attorney, draw up an informal agreement with a friend or make arrangements with an extended pet-care sanctuary, for example, why not do it today?

Patricia Fry is a cat mom to three formerly feral kitties. She’s the author of 45 books, including five books in the new Klepto Cat Mystery series. For more information, visit www.patriciafry.com.