Sam I Am Without A Doubt

How to describe Sam? Hmm. Perhaps the best way to approach this is to say that Sam is to “cat” as James Stewart is to “actor”: the consummate embodiment of a concept. Critic Andrew Sarris once called Stewart “the most complete actor-personality in the American cinema,” but Stewart had to acquire the precision, passion, enthusiasm and goal-orientation that earned him that label. Sam, on the other hand, was born feline—and in her 4-plus years of existence, she’s exploited “catliness” for all it’s worth.

Samantha (to use her full name) endured two stays at the Robin I. Kroogman New Haven Animal Shelter, being adopted the first time as a rambunctious kitten named Jeep. When she was returned roughly a year later, she bore a new name, a significant weight problem and plenty of ‘tude. Shelter staff members helped Sam diet back down to her sleek fighting weight, but this cat’s proud independence and territoriality never wavered.

Most volunteers who got too close to her—either intentionally or by accident—became accustomed to receiving a hiss, scratch or smack. These rebukes were never malicious, merely matter of fact in a “don’t-tread-on-me” sort of way. At other times, they were her way of grabbing someone’s attention, to be let out of her cage or given a treat. Her eccentricities—combined with her black-and-white, tuxedo-cat beauty—earned her a great deal of (sometimes grudging) affection from both volunteers and staff. Her naughty misdeeds and interpersonal insults were greeted with the exasperated expression “Oh, Sam!” so often she could be forgiven for thinking “Oh” was part of her name. Yet she paid a big price for her truculence: Living for more than two years without a forever home. No potential adopter seemed willing to embrace her, quirks and all.

Until Meghann Oskins came along. Oskins is accustomed to emotionally complicated cats, having previously adopted a similarly overlooked lady named July from the shelter in 2015. Over the ensuing five years, July was never given to shows of affection. “She didn’t want to be held, snuggled or anything like that—she’d give you dirty looks, scratch or hiss,” Meghann says. “Then one day, out of the blue, she jumped up in my lap and looked totally confused about how she had gotten there. But I think she was finally starting to figure out that she could trust me. After that, it was just baby steps towards trying to reinforce the idea that she was safe with me.”

July’s big turning point came after Oskins boyfriend Victor DIGNALLO joined the household. “She took a particular liking to him,” Meghann says. When the COVID pandemic prompted the couple to move to a new home, they couldn’t find a new place that would allow both a cat and Oskins’ dog, an elderly Papillon named Jasmine—so Meghann moved back into her father’s house with Jasmine and Victor into an apartment with July. “They really, really bonded. July would greet Victor at the door when he came home from work, jump into his lap and start purring, which we’d never heard before. When we all moved back in together last August, we were like one big happy family. It was so cute—she was always on the couch and would sleep in bed with us at night.”

Sadly, July passed away some months later, leaving Oskins ready for a new challenge. What attracted her to Sam, she says, was that “no one else wanted her, so it seemed she was for me.” Meghann also loved Sam’s optimism—the fact that she had been at the shelter so long and yet had lost none of her feistiness or love of life. “It’s like she’s always looking forward to tomorrow, and it’s crazy, because I don’t know a single human being like that. Everyone I know is, like, dead inside. But then I look at her and there’s so much life in those green eyes.”
When Sam finally moved to her new home in February, she needed a few days to get acclimated. “At first, she was under the bed, terrified of everything,” Meghann says. “I think the size of the house intimidated her.” However, she wasted no further time making herself part of the family, winning her new owners over by purring, head-butting, making biscuits (kneading) and cuddling up with them in bed. In addition to these signature feline behaviors, Oskins has noted some special traits:

- **She chews her fingernails.** “She’ll just sit there and gnaw away at them. Now that’s something I’ve never seen before.”

- **She loves—we’re talking LURVES—dogs.** At the shelter, Sam seemed to have a sincere dislike of other cats but welcomed pretty much every dog who visited the cat room, large or small, with open paws. She even preferred volunteers who smelled of dogs. In her new family, she’s done her damnedest to win over her 17-year-old sibling Jasmine, who’s now deaf and losing her vision. “Sometimes I feel bad for Sam, because she’ll try to lay down in Jasmine’s bed with her, and Jasmine will bark like ‘Get out of here.’” Sam will even head-butt Jasmine, slamming her head into the dog’s shoulder and rubbing her until she gets to Jasmine’s face. “It’s really sweet.”

- **She may be part sea otter.** “The other day I was in the bathroom and looking into the hallway, and she went flying by the bathroom doorway on her back. She must have pushed herself away from a wall using her back leg. I was like, ‘What is she doing?’ I went out into the hallway, and she did it again, turning herself around and pushing back in the opposite direction.”

- **She’s a Daddy’s girl.** “Sam’s very vocal and has a lot to say, and she really likes Victor. Recently, I had COVID and was home from work for a week, so we spent a lot of time together, but she didn’t talk at all. Then Victor would come home, and she’d jump up and run to the door like a dog, going ‘meow, meow, meow’ as if she was saying, ‘Hi! How are you? How was work? I missed you. Let’s sit on the couch.’”

- **She could be a supermodel.** “She’s immaculate, always a ’10.’ Her fur is so soft, and she’s so healthy. She loves to be photographed. We do photo sessions in which she poses for me. She makes love to the camera from any angle with those smoldering eyes.” Naturally, she has high expectations for her surroundings. “There have been times when I thought, ‘Sam seems angry,’ and then I notice there’s a couple of turds in the cat box.”

Though they obviously love her dearly, Meghann and Victor don’t pretend Sam is perfect. “She is rambunctious and very fresh in the way cats are fresh,” Oskins says. “But she’s not malicious at all. Her heart is good, she’s not a bad cat.”
Portraits of Love

In February 2022, the Miller Branch of the New Haven Free Public Library went to the cats…and the dogs! Ms. Kristin Wetmore, an art teacher at Cooperative Arts & Humanities High School, contacted the Robin I. Kroogman New Haven Animal Shelter last fall with an intriguing idea to have her students paint portraits of the adoptable animals at the shelter. She had seen a project that an art instructor had done in another state and hoped the shelter would help her painting class with a similar undertaking.

The Friends of the New Haven Animal Shelter sent Ms. Wetmore photos of their adoptable dogs and cats, and the students went to work. Snoopy’s playfulness, Pebbles’ sweetness and Sam’s beauty, along with others, were charmingly captured in the students’ paintings. The portraits were displayed in the meeting room at the Miller Branch for the month of February, bringing smiles to everyone who visited. Local media discovered the project, and subsequent articles helped highlight the animals at the shelter and put a spotlight on the importance of adoption.

All of the animals featured in the paintings are no longer at the shelter, and one person even contacted the Friends to inquire about obtaining the portrait of her newly adopted dog. Ms. Wetmore hopes to turn this project into a yearly endeavor, and we hope that future installations will be as successful as this one was!

Thank You for Being a Friend

“You can always tell about somebody by the way they put their hands on an animal.”

So said Betty White, actress, producer, and animal lover who passed away on December 31, 2021, just weeks shy of her 100th birthday. In her honor, fans responded to her Betty White Challenge and supported our shelter animals. We thank all of them!

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WE THANK YOU - IN MEMORIAM

Janice Abele in memory of Martha Sullivan and Margret Foley.
Karen Allison in memory of Gromit, “a much-loved cat of the Jensen family.”
Anne Bailey in memory of Cheetah.
Kathryn Barringham in memory of Maggie. “I will forever love you Mag. You were my life.”
Richard and Jeanne Bates in memory of Muffin, Charlie, Ginger, and Lilly.
Sharon Bornholz in memory of “Little Rossie Ross.”
John And Eileen Brannigan in memory of Dr. Osorio – DVM.
Debra Camputaro in memory of Ku Kui, “you were a gift to each other.”
Maryhelen Carroll in memory of Penelope, beloved companion of Jill King.
Laurel C. Casey in memory of Fred the Chihuahua.
Robin Covino in memory of Pom Pom and Rae Rae.
Brian Blakeley and Terry Freeman in memory of Kate, Nell-Bob, and Betty.
Monica Coforescano in memory of Harley.
Edward Danaher in memory of Seamus.
F. Christopher and Janet Bond Arterton

In memory of Catherine
Doyle-Gambardella
Harvey Bixon
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In honor of:
Catherine Benedetti in honor of Casey.
Karen and Scott Cahill in honor of Joan Pro-to’s birthday.
Bonita Cohen in honor of Fran Van Tienen.
Elaine Cooper in honor of D.O.T.S., Kats, and Bonni.
Mary Drury in honor of Huey.
Gina D’Errico in honor of Eddie.
Christine Festa in honor of Jake (shelter name Dorset) and Vito (shelter name Samson), Misty (praying for her safe return) and Marsha Rabe.
Holly Flugrath in honor of the Friends of the New Haven Animal Shelter.
The Hosey Family (Pat, Tara, Bridget, and Claire) in honor of Peter Stevenson.
Alison Kelly in honor of Zach Weiss.
John Levis in honor of Jamaica the pit bull.
Margaret Mann in honor of Lizzy, “adopted August 2018 from the New Haven Animal Shelter.”
Patrick McCarthy in honor of Karen McCarthy.
Marth Parvis in honor of Carol Asprelli’s birthday.
Tina Spose in honor of “my mom, Merete Bormanis.”
Elaine and Lily Spinato in honor of Joan Pro-to’s birthday.
Honey Sue Springut in honor of Sophie “who rescued me as much as I rescued her.”
Sarah Strickland in honor of Dellaiah.
Cynthia Walker and Patrick Edwards in honor of “our new puppies Pearla and Alvin.”
Catherine Walker in honor of “Daisey (droplet) adopted Oct 2014.”
Maureen Williams in honor of “all the kind people who work/volunteer at the New Haven Animal Shelter. Thank you.”
Karlene Wood in honor of Ann Drabkin.
Our Special Thanks To:

Alternative Universe
Awning Cleaning Industries
Katherine Barringham
The Curran Foundation
The Diamonte Giving Fund
Whitney Doel and her Birthday Drive
Faxon Law New Haven Road Race
Green & Sklarz Foundation Trust
McDonald’s Corporation
Huey’s Power of Love
The Daniel and Sharon Milikowsky Family Foundation
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Gayle and William Van Huysen
Wally, Betsy, and Kim

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Julian Aiken
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Robert Bliss USMC (Ret.) “Thank you for all you do for pets!”
Carolyn, Bill, Lucky and shelter graduate Maya
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The Consorte Family – In honor of Savannah who we adopted 8 years ago!
Carly Fischer
In lieu of a Valentine’s Day gift for my husband Steve Burkman from Wendy Gamba
Cadah Goulet and shelter graduate Luna – “Thank you for everything you do for pets!”
Pamela K. Green, daughter Kayla and my grand puppy Yankee
Tanya Iacono
Kathryn James
Kendall Kollmer
Rocky LaDore
Jamie Malette
Maria Paula Montoya Mayorga
Kathi Otto
Chris Plass “Happy holidays from Pooja and me.”
In Honor of Raymond Pol from Laura Katan Pol and Michael Pol
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Spring 2022

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Four paws way up to our adopters and supporters. We could never carry out our mission without you. We – and our shelter animals – are so thankful!

AmongFRIENDS contributors:
Patricia Grandjean, Terry Nolan, Elaine Spinato, Deb Wan