

## CommunityCatsPodcast\_Ep407\_PamJohnsonBennett\_210607.mp3

**Kristen Petrie** [00:00:02]

You've tuned into The Community Cats Podcast. Ready? Let's go.

**Stacy LeBaron** [00:00:13]

Welcome to a special episode of The Community Cats Podcast. I'm your host Stacy LeBaron and I've been involved helping homeless cats for over twenty years with the Merrimack River Feline Rescue Society. The goal of this podcast is to expose you to absolutely amazing people who are improving the lives of cats. I hope these interviews will help you learn how you can turn your passion for cats into action. And today we're speaking with Pam Johnson-Bennett. Pam is a certified cat behavior consultant and best-selling author of eight books on cat behavior. She's starred in The Animal Planet series "Psycho Kitty" and Pam was Vice President of the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants and founded their cat division. She has served on the advisory board for the American Humane Association and lectures internationally on cat behavior and training. She's contributed in Cats Magazine, Modern Cat Magazine, The Daily Cat and Cat Fancy. She was also the resident cat behavior expert, pre-Yahoo and iVillage. She's considered a pioneer in the field of cat behavior consulting, having started her career in nineteen eighty-two. Her books have been used as textbooks for behavior courses and she's influenced many practicing in the field and "Think Like a Cat" is commonly referred to as the cat Bible. Pam, I'd like to welcome you to the show.

**Pam Johnson-Bennett** [00:01:30]

Thank you.

**Stacy LeBaron** [00:01:31]

Well, as I have told people earlier today, I'm such a Pam Johnson-Bennett groupie. So I'm very excited to have you here, and it's an honor and a privilege. So, thank you for joining me today. I know you've asked, had this question asked of you, like millions and millions of times. But how did you become passionate about cats?

**Pam Johnson Bennet** [00:01:48]

It was through necessity. I had adopted two kittens, didn't know anything about cats. It was a winter day. I was Christmas shopping and there was a girl standing outside of a church, on a snowy day, with two kittens left in a box and she said if I didn't take them, she was going to dump them out. So I brought these kittens home that were way too young to be separated from their mom, and proceeded to do everything wrong. Everything. And when I brought them to the veterinarian for vaccinations, when they were about maybe a year old, the vet said, boy, these cats are awful. You should just put them to sleep and not deal with it. And I went home thinking how, if they're messed up, I did it and I'm going to fix it. And I went in and tried to find information. There really wasn't behavior information out there. So, I depended on the cats and I learned a lot and actually got my cats to be very well-adjusted happy cats. So much so that when I brought them back the following year for their vaccinations, the veterinarian started asking me if I would work with cats in his practice, on behavior. So I did it a long time for free and then finally realized, hey, maybe I could make a living doing this. And that's how it started. It was accidental but I think it actually gave me a lot of credibility because I've been in those shoes. You know when clients tell me oh, you'll be so embarrassed to know what I did. I did it. So I get it. I know about that frustration.

**Stacy** [00:03:21]

So many of the folks that I've had on the show and I've interviewed, have a very unique journey. You know, they're going on this different path. They never thought they would get from here to here to here and it sounds like you had a problem, you needed to solve the problem and then you realized, hey, maybe everybody else has this problem too and maybe I can help, answering their questions and their concerns through your experiences. And, you know, a lot of your approaches around being a detective, looking and seeing what cats are doing. What are the key components of things that we need to look at with our own cats? You know, what are the most frequent concerns that you hear from people?

**Pam** [00:03:58]

I'll tell you a big mistake is that people approach behavior as if it's wrong. As if the cat is misbehaving. So the cat is eliminating outside of the litter box because he's spiteful or he's stupid or he's mad at me. The cat is scratching the sofa because he's

destructive. And when you have that attitude, and that's what I learned early on, is that that's what skews your ability to fix the problem because it's not a misbehavior. The cat is doing a normal behavior. It's just not acceptable to us but we've got to figure out what is the cat trying to say? And how can I correct that so that it's acceptable to the cat and to me. And that was the light bulb moment, was that that's what everyone does. And I still have it when clients call me, it's always, oh my cat, he's so stupid. Or my cat is so mean or spiteful, and that's what you have to change. You have to look at it from your cat's point of view, and that's where the think like a cat mentality came from in the book, was looking at everything as if you were a cat so that you could see the logic and why a cat is performing a specific behavior.

**Stacy** [00:05:10]

So you mentioned litter boxes and, I believe I was born and raised, I probably read this from you in your early books. Because you were with me in the early nineties when I was handling all the surrender calls and everything, and I had your books right by my side at the desk. Yeah, how many litter boxes are we supposed to have for the number of cats that we have in our house?

**Pam** [00:05:29]

Ideally you should have one more box than you have cats, and that's only part of it. It's not just the number, it's the location. So if you have eight cats and you have nine litter boxes, if they're all lined up in one room or on one side of the house, it's still not correct. You have to take into account everyone's core personal area. So that the litter boxes should be scattered around the house. You always want to give the cat a choice to be able to go where he's more comfortable.

**Stacy** [00:06:00]

So you use the phrase core personal area. What does that mean?

**Pam** [00:06:04]

Within your multi-cat household or even if you just have one cat, there's probably areas where the cat prefers to sleep, to eat, and hang out. And that's where he feels safest. So you may find if you have a few cats that you can identify one cat who really likes to hang out in the bedroom and really claims the owners bed, and there's another cat who loves to hang out in the den, you know, because that's sunny and that's where you can always find her. So if you look around your house and look at

your cats, you could probably identify oh yeah, this is Fluffy's favorite spot, you know, and that maybe the reason a cat is eliminating outside of the litter box is that he has to cross another cat's preferred area and that makes him nervous.

**Stacy** [00:06:53]

One of the reasons why we're here today is we are talking about a campaign that you've partnered with Arm and Hammer, and they have a variety of different types of cat litter. Is the type of cat litter that we use in our litter boxes, are their preferences to the different kinds of litter that's out there?

**Pam** [00:07:11]

Well, it's really important to pay attention to what your cat likes. You may like a particular litter but if your cat doesn't like it and doesn't want to use it, it's not going to be any good. In general, cats like a soft, sandy substrate that's easy to dig in. And cats don't like abrupt changes. So if you're using a litter and you decide oh, I want to change litters, do that gradually so that your cat doesn't have a big shock because they are creatures of habit. When they go in the litter box, they want the same texture, same scent or lack of scent. So just pay attention to that.

**Stacy** [00:07:45]

So you've partnered with Arm and Hammer, in honor of National Cat Day. So if this is not airing on National Cat Day we'll say happy National Cat Day anyway. You've partnered with them from October twenty-ninth through Thanksgiving I believe, on a campaign. Would you be willing to share with us just a little bit about the details around that?

**Pam** [00:08:05]

Yes, I'm excited and honored to be a part of this. Earlier this year, before COVID, Arm and Hammer had approached me to help a shelter cat, who had actually gone viral online, transition to her new home. And you may be familiar with Perdita, the cat from Mitchell County Animal Rescue, who was dubbed the world's worst cat and by working with her and her new family, we were able to show everyone there are no bad cats. In honor of National Cat Day, Arm and Hammer cat litter is launching a new campaign to help perfectly imperfect cats find their forever homes, on the website [felinegenerous.com](https://felinegenerous.com). So Arm and Hammer wants to kind of play on that success that

they have, so that all perfectly imperfect cats have the best chance of getting adopted.

**Stacy** [00:08:59]

That's great. That's wonderful. I mean one of the things with the Merrimack River Feline Rescue Society when, which we still have, is we sort of are known as an organization that will take the feline leukemia positive cats, will take the cats over the age of, it's now fifteen. I mean used to be over the age of five and we considered that an old cat. Now it's, you know, anybody over the age of ten, in some shelters it's over fifteen, where you're considered an old cat. Crabby cats, the crabby old ladies, the grumpy old men, those kinds of cats and it's really wonderful to have an environment to be able to profile those cats. I was thinking about kitten yoga, I was doing a fundraising day conference last week and we were talking about kitten yoga as a fundraiser. Well, how about getting the old stiff cats in there? I mean my cats when I try to do yoga here, they try and plop right down, right when I'm doing my yoga. And so I think that the older cats, they like yoga just as much as those kittens do. So. I think that the more that we can do to get some of those cats out into the public eye, the better off they're going to be in being able to find a home for them. So congratulations to you, to Arm and Hammer, to the team to be able to bring them forward. It sounds like many of the clients you've worked with have been older cats?

**Pam** [00:10:10]

Older cats or cats who have misunderstood behaviors. You know, people don't understand what the motivation for a behavior is or there also, you know, we're labeling perfectly imperfect. We say that with so much love, is that whether it's a cat who has a disability, an issue, you know, don't pass these cats up. They do very well. So now through Thanksgiving, Arm and Hammer has launched this campaign. So you can, shelters can nominate cats who may have been getting passed up, either because of age, appearance, disability or misunderstood personalities, by going to [felinegenerousstories.com](https://felinegenerousstories.com) and nominating those cats. So, the first one hundred shelters who nominate cats will receive, each, one hundred dollars' worth of Arm and Hammer cat litter. And then I'm going to be a part of a panel that includes two other cat experts, and we will select three winning cats. And then those three winning cats from those shelters will receive counseling services from me. And the three shelters will receive each ten thousand dollars from Arm and Hammer cat litter. The two other

panelists are Doctor Ilona Rodan, veterinarian, international speaker and author, and Amber Lowery from Mitchell County Animal Rescue. She is the executive director. This is the opportunity. Let's get these cats out there. Let's get people seeing and sharing and it's a wonderful opportunity for these cats and it's a wonderful opportunity for the shelters. So people, you don't even, it doesn't always have to be a shelter. So, if you're a cat lover, and you want to nominate or share or browse the gallery about these cats, then go to [felinegenerousstories.com](https://felinegenerousstories.com), use the hashtag [felinegenerous](https://twitter.com/felinegenerous) and hashtag contest. Let's spread the word. This is such a wonderful initiative for these cats who are sitting in shelters because maybe they're fifteen years old, or they have hearing issues or they've had a leg amputated, or they've been relinquished to the shelter for a behavior problem or labeled with a bad personality. Let's work on this and get these cats in their forever home.

**Stacy** [00:12:34]

You know, what have you heard over this period of time with regards to cats and shelters and COVID? What have you learned over the last six months or so?

**Pam** [00:12:44]

It has been a wonderful opportunity for people to adopt while people were home. It was a great chance because you could spend a lot of time with the cat. So if you were bringing a cat into a multi-cat household, you had the time to do a good introduction. You had the time to help with behavior issues and do training. There were some negatives with that though too. I found that I had clients who were having behavior problems because they weren't following the schedule. The cats were doing attention-getting behaviors and the cat parents were giving in. So the cats are getting used to oh, whenever I meow and walk across the keyboard, I get treats or I'm getting extra food in order, you know, to shut me up. And then that was a behavior that had to be corrected. And then the other issue is now that we're out and about more and a lot of people are back at work, not all of us are still at home, you know, stuck to the computer, it's a big shock for the cat. So some of them have had separation issues and they're very confused. So my advice would be if you are still home and you are dealing with behavior issues, stick to the routine, work on training and use love not extra food. We want to avoid those attention-getting behaviors and we don't want to come out of this with cats who are overweight. There's probably

already enough people who are coming out of it, you know, gaining a COVID twenty. We don't want cats getting that too

**Stacy** [00:14:13]

That's great. That's a really good point and I'm sure I would be breaking down and breaking all those rules unfortunately too. I think that's it's a real challenge to not get won over or manipulated by our pets. So it's a really tough challenge that's for sure. So in addition to, you know, helping with this campaign, obviously you're a writer and you're always busy writing books, releasing books. What's been on your docket over the last year or so?

**Pam** [00:14:40]

Well, I'm really excited, in September I released "Cat vs Cat". It's the new updated, revised, better than ever version of my multi-cat book because multi-cat households really have unique challenges. You know, when you have one cat and everything in the house basically belongs to that cat, that cat never has to worry about who's going to use the litter box, who's going to steal her food, you know, who she has to share space with. When you add another cat, everything changes. It's like you've taken the house and rearranged everything and both cats get completely confused. So the rules change in a multi-cat household. So it was time for an update of that book. So if you have the original, I've added a lot more information. So I know a lot more than I did back then. So, but it's "Cat vs. Cat" and it's available now.

**Stacy** [00:15:34]

I want to go back to felinegenerous and just share a few other components. I know you had mentioned about the first hundred shelters that are registering are getting a hundred pounds of cat litter from Arm and Hammer, sorry, a hundred dollars worth of Arm and Hammer, what other benefits, is there a way to, there's something about linking to a wish list or something like that?

**Pam** [00:15:56]

Right, the feline generous site itself, [felinegenerous.com](https://felinegenerous.com), shelters can go there and they can upload their Amazon wishlist. Felinegenerous is a wonderful platform for connecting people with shelters in their area. We're seeing what they can do in terms of monetary donations or adding to wish lists. So shelters can go to [felinegenerous.com](https://felinegenerous.com) and there are directions on there on how to join that network.

And again, if you're interested in nominating a cat from a shelter or your shelter, and you want to take part in this, I would not pass this opportunity up because I know in every shelter, there is a cat that they're having trouble getting adopted. So visit [felinegenerousstories.com](https://felinegenerousstories.com) for that. And then we're going to have a winner sometime in early December. So the contest ends November 30th and then we'll pick a winner in early December, but it's a wonderful opportunity. I mean these cats, oh my gosh, the lifetime of love that you're going to offer them, it's so wonderful. Imagine an older cat at a shelter, who has been there for years, everyone has passed up because they want the one-year-old two-year-old cat or they want the kitten. Can you imagine the love that you're going to receive from that cat?

**Stacy** [00:17:12]

It's tremendous. You're making me want to go out and get a cat. Unfortunately, my love of my life Hooch, which many folks know he passed away back in April, and I've still been sort of trying to recover from that. You know, I'm creeping closer and closer.

**Pam** [00:17:28]

But the good part about that is it even if you can't adopt another cat, you can share this information. So we're getting the word out about these cats who are being overlooked. So, that's where using the hashtag [felinegenerous](https://felinegenerous.com) and contest spread the word. We've always talked about, you know, if you can't adopt, donate, if you can't donate money, donate something, even if it's your time, share information. Everything matters. Everything that you do to help these animals will make a difference.

**Stacy** [00:17:58]

That's fantastic. Anything else, this is very motivating, a great line there and I feel like we can close but I'd really like to have this opportunity to share with folks. Any other last thoughts, either about the work that you're doing, or what we can do. I mean, you've shared a lot of ideas but I'm eager to get your book, your re-released book, but you know, anything else you want to share with our listeners while you have our attention today?

**Pam** [00:18:25]



Let's keep on the subject of these perfectly imperfect cats. If you're thinking well, I don't know if I can handle a cat with a disability, or I don't know if I could handle a cat with a behavior problem, let's talk about behavior issues. Keep in mind, the behavior problem may have only occurred in the environment that cat was in. It may not happen in your home and also view the cat as a clean slate. I always tell clients okay, you're going down the wrong road, let's stop going down that road. Stop and we're turning around. So just start from scratch and get to know that cat. Don't overwhelm the cat and you'll start to see that behavior blossom. If you're dealing with a cat with a disability, cats do very well whether it's hearing loss, vision loss, lack of mobility. Just set up your environment to help the cat succeed and you'll do great. And if people need more information on behavior, my website [catbehaviorassociates.com](https://catbehaviorassociates.com), I have so many articles on there. So even if you're not in a position to buy a book, I've just put out as much information on the website as possible because my dream is that someday, my type of profession won't be needed because people will have the tools they need to understand their cats better.

**Stacy** [00:17:58]

Makes so much sense, and I've been on your website and it is full of a lot of information. So regardless of what's going on with your cat, I encourage everybody to check out your website that's fantastic. Pam, I want to thank you so much for spending a few minutes with me today and being a guest on my show and our special episode of The Community Cats Podcast, and I hope we'll have you on again in the future.

**Pam** [00:20:01]

Thank you so much for having me.

**Stacy** [00:20:03]

That's it for this week. Please head over to Apple podcasts and leave a review. We love to hear what you think, and a five-star review really helps others find the show. You can also join the conversation with listeners, cat caretakers, and me on Facebook and Instagram. And don't forget to hit follow or subscribe on Spotify, Apple podcast, Google podcast, YouTube, Stitcher or wherever you listen to podcasts, so you don't miss a single show. Thanks for listening and thank you for everything that you do to help create a safe and healthy world for cats.