

## CommunityCatsPodcast\_Ep408\_Reimers\_210615.mp3

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

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

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

Welcome to The Community Cats Podcast. I am your host, Stacy LeBaron. 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 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 Rita Reimers. Rita possesses a unique ability to understand the tender nature of cats and she shares her home with cats of all ages and temperaments. "I never met a cat I couldn't help" says Rita. "I understand cats and their subtle ways of letting us know what they want and it's become my mission to help cat owners understand and communicate better with their felines". Rita's cat magic comes from over thirty years of experience as a multi-cat owner and cat rescue volunteer. Understanding cats and their behaviors is a natural ability for Rita and she considers it her calling in life. Her cat behavior counseling services has helped people better understand their cat companions and find solutions to issues that might otherwise cause a cat to be surrendered to a rescue or shelter. Rita currently hosts a radio show on Pet Life Radio affectionately called Nineteen Cats and Counting, the number of cats she currently lives with. Rita also writes a cat behavior health and advice column called A New Cattitude, which is featured in every issue of Catster magazine and also writes a monthly piece for Litter Genie's website called Kitty-Corner. Rita, I'd like to welcome you to the show.

**Rita Reimers** [00:01:45]

Thank you so much Stacy. I so appreciate you having me. I like nothing better than to talk about cats.

**Stacy** [00:01:52]

Well, you seem to have your paw in a lot of different buckets that's for sure.

**Rita** [00:01:57]

I do, I do. I just love cats, I always have. I used to, until this year, own a counseling pet-sitting company too called Just for Cats Petsitting. Actually merged with Meow Town earlier this year. They just have the same philosophy about cats and the fact that they kind of require special understanding and care.

**Stacy** [00:02:19]

Yeah, so stepping back in time. How did you become passionate about cats?

**Rita** [00:02:24]

It was something I was born with. I always told my mom when I was little that I was a cat. She'd find me with the neighbor cats or if we were visiting friends and they had cats, you know if they couldn't find Rita, she was wherever the cat was. And she would say oh, be careful, that cat's gonna scratch you. Oh, no, Mom, I'm a cat too. They won't scratch me. I always made her dress me up as a cat for Halloween. Unfortunately, I couldn't have a cat because we had allergies in the family. So I grew up with a wonderful dog named Blazer, he was a lab-golden mix. As soon as I got married, first thing I told my husband, my then husband, was we had to have cats and it started when I was twenty-four. I brought home my first cat Inga and later Dieter, and it just kind of grew from there.

**Stacy** [00:03:11]

That's fantastic. That's wonderful. You have embarked on a relatively new show on Pet Life Radio, that's called Nineteen Cats and Counting. As a fellow podcaster, I want to welcome you to the community and tell us a little bit about your show and what you focus on.

**Rita** [00:03:30]

Nineteen Cats and Counting. It's everything cat, cat behavior related obviously, but we talk about a lot of things. I've had some wonderful guests. I had Mayim Bialik on, she's very involved in cat-focused causes. She actually adopted a special needs cat when she was out in New York doing an interview, and she heard about this special needs cat that was in a full body cast. He was missing something in his diaphragm, but she ended up adopting the cat. She's just got that new show "Call Me Kat", we spoke all about that. But then I also have people on like Lynea, who runs Cat House on the Kings, and talking about, you know, why she has to take in so many cats and

the issues around spay/neuter and over-population. So we talk about everything and then sometimes Linda, my co-host and I, will just do a show like we'll be talking on the phone about stuff, our cats. We're like, you know, this is a show. We need to just do a show, you know. I love my cats, but sometimes they can be frustrating. And what do we do when we feel frustrated when their behaviors are not exactly in sync with what we like and how we change them.

**Stacy** [00:04:36]

So with you having a large number of cats in your house, I'm going to ask the question that everybody always asks everybody, which is how many litter boxes do you have in your house?

**Rita** [00:04:44]

I have seventeen. I have a big bonus room upstairs, which actually, I just recently adopted two senior cats. The door is open but I always acclimate new cats to that room, and that room has in the back of it six litter boxes and cat trees, and sofas and all of that. And then, of course, I have a two-story home. So, I have to have litter on both stories because, you know, as cats get older, they can't necessarily maneuver the stairs as well. And maybe even if they can, senior cats sometimes when they have to go, they have to go. They need a litter box nearby. So you wouldn't necessarily like walk into my house and go oh, look at all the litter boxes. They're in strategic places where you kind of have to look to find them but the cats know they're there. That's the important part.

**Stacy** [00:05:32]

So we're talking about feline behavior and in your consulting work, is the litter box issue like the primary request you get questions about or are there other topics?

**Rita** [00:05:43]

That's the primary question, is the litter box issues. Sometimes it's medical. Sometimes it's as simple as, as a matter of fact my co-host Linda Hall, her father was getting frustrated with their cat because the cat suddenly started peeing on the bed. Long story short, they had changed the type of litter they were buying. The cat didn't like it. So sometimes it's as simple as that. The other question I get a lot is about integrating new cats into the household, something that I do all the time and I've done a lot. I have twenty now. That's my max. If I can get my twenty to get along,

you surely can get your two to get along. I've done so many consultations where I'll walk into the house, back when I could do them in person, and they're like, oh, I have three cats. This one lives in that room. This one lives in that room. This one lives in that room. Well, how do you expect them to all get along when you keep them separated? They've got to go through that. You've got to guide them through that integration process. No one can live like that. That's awful.

**Stacy** [00:06:37]

So, when you counsel people, you will counsel them on the multi-cat issues, on how to get them introduced properly. What do you see with regards to, you know, determining a behavior issue versus a medical issue? Is it basically, if something has changed, bring them to the vet or, in the case with the litter box you were talking about, where you thought the cat might have been, someone might have said, oh if the cat is peeing on the bed you've got to take the cat to the vet but it turned out it was an environmental change. So, do you go through like a checklist before-hand that then says okay no, now we need to go to the vet because maybe this is a physical issue?

**Rita** [00:07:13]

I always suggest they go to the vet first, you know. If this is a problem that just suddenly started, unless we know they've changed the litter, and even then I say you know, if your cat hasn't been to the vet in a while, you might want to take them to the vet. Because all the behavior counseling in the world in the perfect environment won't help if an issue is born of a medical problem. I remember one lady I was helping and in fact, Jackson Galaxy had also helped her. One cat, she had three, and they used to love each other and the one cat suddenly started attacking the other one. And come to find out, she took that cat to the vet, both Jackson and I told her she had to have that vet consult first and he had something wrong with his hip. I'm not sure exactly what it was, it's been a while, but he was in pain. And what had happened was the other cat jumped on him to play and it hurt him. So ever since then, he associated that cat with pain. Knowing that and treating his medical physical issue first so that he was not in pain anymore was the key and it took two of us to convince her that that needed to happen first.

**Stacy** [00:08:20]

So it's interesting. So you really do have to become a detective to try and figure this stuff out and it's not necessarily, you know, a checklist but yet you write quite a few columns and so you're always writing, you're always presenting information in the columns. What are some of the topics that you write about in Catster, you know, and also for the website?

**Rita** [00:08:41]

A lot of time it's about integration, or if you're bringing a new cat home. If you've never had a cat before, what do they need? What are their basic needs? Sometimes I write about, especially around the holidays, what are the dangers in the household? Right, what are the things we need to make sure our cats don't have access to at Christmas, you know, tinsel, ribbon, those kinds of things, table food, just really anything cat. At Catster, they give me the topic. The one I'm writing right now is how to handle a kitten, how to socialize a kitten so that they're not biting or scratching and playing rough all the time and what are some special considerations when you bring a new kitten home? My co-host Linda, she's also my best friend. She'll tell me a lot you know things you don't know you know, because I'll think it's common sense and she'll be like, well, no, it's common sense to you. But especially to a new cat owner or somebody who's always had dogs, they don't necessarily know this stuff.

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**Stacy** [00:09:38]

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**Kristen** [00:10:40]

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**Stacy** [00:10:47]

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**Stacy** [00:11:49]

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**Stacy** [00:12:42]

You also have some experience in the rescue world and a sort of understanding of the big picture issues of what we're all facing with the community cats being out there, doing TNR and cat overpopulation. So, as a feline behaviorist, you know, what are your thoughts about cats in our society?

**Rita** [00:13:03]

Well, it's ironic, that cats are the number one pet now, slightly edging out dogs, and I think that's because a lot of cat owners have multiple cats but it's also ironic that they seem to be the most throw away pet. Cats in the shelter are always second place to dogs, even the Humane Society and the SPCA here, very dog centric, very dog focused. Also found in the pet sitting world when I owned Just for Cats Petsitting, all the pet-sitting websites, very dog focused. I love dogs too don't get me wrong but you're not going to attract a cat lover with something that's dog centric. Another company came to me wanting me to help promote Zesty Paws, their products. Like, okay, you have two cat products on your roster. When you get a little more cat products, I'm happy to help you. I just think our society seems to be so dog focused that cats really get, they get sold short sometimes. I'm glad to see that there's more pet sitters becoming cats only because that's really important to someone to know that you understand a cat is not a small dog, and they have a totally different temperament and need a special approach. I especially found once I moved down South. There's just a whole different mentality around spay/neuter down here and about indoor versus outdoor cats. Because, you know, a lot of these people that grew up the country, they're country folks, they're farm people, they live in rural areas. They think it's fine to let their cats roam around outside un-spayed, un-neutered, having babies and it's not. That's why we have the overpopulation we have, you know, built up over so many years. It snowballed and there's so many cats out there now, TNR can't keep up. You know, people really have to start paying attention and doing that spay/neuter because there's other benefits to spay/neuter besides just population control, although, that's the biggie.

**Stacy** [00:15:11]

Right, and then, you know, also, the hard part is, as you say, many people own multiple cats, probably more so than they own dogs. And in many cases too folks, as their income level goes down, the number of cats they have go up. So where if your income level goes up, the number of dogs you have go up. So there's this inverse relationship. And so there's a huge question around affordability. If I have to pay a hundred dollars to get a cat spayed and neutered which in, at least in New England, that's like a fair price at a low cost spay/neuter clinic. If so, if I have five cats and I need to do it that's five hundred dollars. You know, that's potentially my rent. So it's the access to these resources and to the care, it's just really challenging. And so I'm still a firm believer of the importance of having targeted spay/neuter programs, for owned as well as for TNR cats, you know, that are really dirt cheap, you know, ten bucks, maybe thirty bucks, something like that.

**Rita** [00:16:09]

There's one here that's twenty-five dollars. I live thirty miles south of Charlotte and there's an organization in Charlotte, twenty-five dollars but you have to make the appointment, you have to take the cat. My mom, she doesn't do it now because she's getting a little older, but she used to do the spay/neuter runs for the Humane Society of Lancaster, South Carolina. She would issue the voucher. She had a vet that she used that did them very inexpensively. The dog rates were a little more because that goes by how big the dog is and poundage and she would take the, you know, she picked him them in the morning, you know, somebody would, she'd meet them in the parking lot of she had to on their way to work and she would take them and do the spay/neuter and bring them back because that's also another issue. As you know, people who work when do I take them? When do I have time? So, there are programs in communities. You just have to look and find them. I wish there were more. One of my plans with my best friend and business partner Linda, we would like to start an outreach here in the Carolinas. Two of my big focuses are senior cats and spay/neuter.

**Stacy** [00:17:13]

I think that's a fantastic idea and, and it's great and I hope you do that. I hope you do that very soon.



**Rita** [00:17:17]

Me too. I get phone calls every day of people wanting me to take their senior cats. Twenty is my max. I actually took in three senior cats this year. One of them only lived a few months, but he had a happy last few months with me. I don't understand why and how people can discard those seniors that have been so faithful to them through all the years. I could never do it.

**Stacy** [00:17:40]

It's a, I mean, obviously there must have been some situation that made it extremely challenging for them, probably something financial, moving is obviously a huge issue.

**Rita** [00:17:52]

Well, you know what, about moving I have to say this. I don't mean to interrupt you but when I left California, I had seventeen cats. They all came with me. I drove them cross country four days to North Carolina.

**Stacy** [00:18:05]

Yeah, oh, and I've heard the stories of folks renting RVs and you know, bringing them down that way. I had a friend who rented an RV and brought, from Massachusetts to Florida, I want to say, I think was like fifteen cats and brought them down and moved down into Florida.

**Rita** [00:18:24]

So if we can do that, you can move two cats. Come on.

**Stacy** [00:18:28]

Yeah, and I'm sure there's financial issues but I agree with you and I think that a lot of the shelters are starting to do a little bit of pushback on folks to really find out, you know, is this an urgent situation or is it a convenient surrender or that kind of thing too. So I think animal sheltering, the environment is changing dramatically and organizations are starting to hire like social workers now, to try and really sort through the issues and find out, you know, what's the why behind here? What's the issue that's causing the problem.

**Rita** [00:18:56]

I would love to partner with an organization like that and help them out in that capacity. I'm looking for just the right fit here. That's definitely something I would love to do and also, you know, being careful with placement working with rescues. You know, they ask all the pertinent questions. Working in a shelter, if somebody wants to adopt a cat, they just do it. They don't ask any questions. The cat, oh somebody wants a cat, it's out the door, which I understand you want to get them adopted but let's ask some questions, you know, so they don't end up coming back.

**Stacy** [00:18:28]

Right. Or make sure that they don't come in the shelter in the first place and let the community help resolve the problem. Because if there's a healthy-looking cat out in someone's backyard, rather than trapping that cat and bringing that cat into the shelter, maybe that cat is owned, quasi-owned by somebody down the street or somebody, you know, is taking care of it. If the cat's sickly or, you know, not looking good, that's a whole 'nother story. But if you've got a healthy-looking stray cat out there, I'm even of the mindset, you know, you can just get that cat spayed or neutered, throw a little ear tip on the cat. If the cat looks good, somebody's taking care of that cat. There's somebody out there that's invested something into that cat. So, you know, it'll be fine but then like allow for the shelters to be like the emergency triage section for distress situations.

**Rita** [00:20:20]

I'll tell you that's a hot topic on Facebook right now, in the groups, is leave that cat alone. It belongs to someone, don't steal somebody's cat. That's really hot. I was like, whoa, that's really becoming a big issue and I understand it. I used to think people should have a collar on their cat and the other side of the charm, you know, where it has their name should say, I'm an outdoor cat or I'm an indoor cat, help me. Something, so that we know the difference, you know, right.

**Stacy** [00:20:47]

Determining whether that cat is, you know, knows where it's going versus not and I still think we're working through those scenarios as to how to determine whether a cat is lost or whether a cat is a community cat and I still think that's a learning

process for us. But Rita, if there are folks that are interested in finding out more about your work and your show, how would they find you?

**Rita** [00:21:10]

Well, the best way to find me is RitaReimers.com. It's RitaReimers.com. You can find my radio show NineteenCatsandCounting.com. It will redirect you to Pet Life Radio and our radio show and of course, subscribe to Catster Magazine so you can read my articles. Also, we have a clubhouse on RitaReimers.com called Club Cattitude, named after my column, and if you become a member, in there you get archives to all of my Catster articles, I'm about to put twenty-twenty's articles in there, plus a community of cat lovers. You can share ideas, there's different board topics, there's some exclusive video and content. So, you know, if you're having, you know, my cat's keeping me awake at night, I have a video on there and I help you with that, things that you can only get inside the clubhouse but more importantly, you can contact me directly for free if you're a clubhouse member and I'll help you as best I can with your cat problem.

**Stacy** [00:22:10]

Sounds great. Rita, is there anything else you'd like to share with our listeners today?

**Rita** [00:22:14]

Love your cats. Spay/neuter. Spay/neuter. And oh, yeah, spay/neuter.

**Stacy** [00:22:22]

Right on. Yeah. Excellent. Thank you so much for being a guest on our show today and I hope we'll have you out in the future.

**Rita** [00:22:29]

Thank you so much. I really enjoyed it.

**Stacy** [00:22:33]

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

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**Kristen** [00:23:03]

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