

CommunityCatsPodcast_Ep427_Frederick_211026.mp3

Kristen Petrie [00:00:00]

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

Stacy LeBaron [00:00:08]

Welcome to the Community Cats Podcast. I am your host, Stacy LeBaron. I've been involved helping homeless cats for over 20 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 Alison Hunter Frederick. Alison is a cat behavior consultant and trainer as well as a mother of fur kids and a wife of a supportive husband. Through her business, Alison Helps Cats LLC, she helps cat owners improve their relationships with their cats by offering webinars, classes, and consultations. She also creates an animal welfare village for pet lovers through educational articles and interviews at her blog, Lincoln Pet Culture. Prior to the pandemic, Alison, and her youngest cat, Rainy, brought happiness to seniors and youth through cat therapy. In the past, Alison volunteered with Hearts United for Animals at Husker Cats, and fostered for the Capital Humane Society, and joining forces saving lives, Husker Cats Operates a trap neuter return program supported by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with the goal of stabilizing the population of community cats on campus. One of Alison's three cats is from Hearts United for Animals and a second, is a former Husker cat. Currently Alison volunteers with Lincoln Animal Ambassadors, the Cathouse Love on a Leash and Horsham Hospice. The Cat House is a no-kill shelter and adoption facility for cats. Alison and her husband adopted their youngest cat as a kitten through the Cat House. They have also fostered eight litters of kittens, some including stray or feral moms. Alison has a certificate in cat behavior and retention from the Humane Society of the United States and a silver-level certificate from Low Stress Handling University. She's taken multiple cat behavior courses, including Train Your Cat from Karen Prior Academy. She belongs to the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants, Pet Professional Guild, All Pet Collaborative and Best Friends Network Partners. She's also working on her cat behavior certification through the

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants. Wow, Alison, welcome to the show.

Alison Hunter Frederick [00:02:21]

Thank you.

Stacy LeBaron [00:02:23]

You have been busy, busy, busy. Before we dive into everything that you've been doing and working on, and everything, tell me a little bit about how did you become so passionate about cats?

Alison Hunter Frederick [00:02:34]

Well, it started with that one cat. So, there was a stray that showed up in my neighborhood and she never left. And I had been feeding cats, but she was the one that stayed and for a while. I fed her outside, but because my boyfriend, who's now, my husband was allergic to cats. And so, I could never have her in the house. Then, a neighbor of mine took around, see if anybody owner? She was declawed, so, she thought somebody must own, winter was coming. And so, I wanted to get her a home. We, my husband, went around to vet clinics and to different places in the town. We decided, well, she's staying on my porch, and then it was a spare room, you know, we wanted to do the best by this cat and she ended up staying, you know, and she just stayed in my house and she changed everything about how I felt about cats because I hadn't grown up with cats and the few cats that I met, they kind of were the ones that, you know, your pet them a little bit and then they scratch you. I grew up with dogs. I didn't really have any, a lot of knowledge, of cats and didn't have a connection with cats, but she shadowed me, she snuggled with me. She let me train her, she was there when there were storms. She was just there for me all the time. And at that time, I was actually teaching behavior kids and living on my own except for having guinea pigs. So she became my best friend and my companion. And I also kind of consider her like heaven sent because like, I mentioned, my boyfriend, my husband now, has allergies, but with her, he found after a little bit and that he just had to take Claritin and he was okay. He used to get like when he was younger, he would just get the hives and eyes swollen and all that kind of stuff. And he just for her, he just said, stay start taking a Claritin and he was fine. So, we kept her, and I had her for, I think seven or eight years. And she was everything to me.

And when I lost her, in 2014 to heart murmur and chronic kidney failure, my world became cats. I mean, I started volunteering with cats, started doing articles about cats, and that led to everything that you've read in my little bio.

Stacy LeBaron [00:05:01]

So this has all happened since about 2017, all of the growth, the interest in cat behavior. It was interesting that you just mentioned that you had her trained and I'm seemingly finding a path that the folks that sort of grew up with dogs and then they come and they become late in life, cat lovers, tend to understand and appreciate behavior training modification a little bit more from the cat world than if you started out originally as a cat lover and then learning how to do things like training a cat, looking at behavioral issues might be a little bit different. So, like the concept of kitten kindergarten transfers from puppy kindergarten and people sort of understand that better. My niece has a cat, has had it from kitten and she's normally a dog person, totally an adventure cat, you know, goes out in the backpack and goes on the harness, and you know, is high-fiving and jumping through hoops goes on the kayak, even. And all that kind of stuff. And so, I find it's really interesting I don't know if you're seeing those trends too but in my limited experience, I see a different approach to cats from folks that have had dogs in their life versus folks that have been sort of cat only.

Alison Hunter Frederick [00:06:14]

Yeah, I think it can go both ways. I don't know if I said the date, but I actually got her in 2006 and then 2014 she died. So, it's been since 2014 that yeah, I really became a big, but yeah, I meet some dog people who when they get a cat and they try to do everything they would with a dog and they struggle because they don't get what to do. But I also have others who go the other way, which I think was probably my experience. My husband was doing agility with his dog. So, I started doing agility with our cat. I was doing some manner training with our dogs. So, I started doing it with a cat. I had no concept that you can't do this with cats. So, I just started doing things with her. I did try to put her on a harness and a leash and take her out.

Unfortunately, that's actually where it would have been great to have known other cat people, because she was one of those cats that flop down and the leashes and harnesses at that time, were very clunky to get on and I didn't know what to do about that. So we didn't do a whole lot with the leash training. She had been, I mean when

we got her, she had been used to living outside, so we would bring her in our yard and kind of supervise her and the leash was kind of an emergency thing. Eventually we got a stroller for her so she could go on walks. That was our compromise. So, I got some things from the dog world, and I still get some things from the dog world in that and how I handle cats and how I run my business. And some things. I wish I had known more about cats from the beginning because there's things I'm sure I could have done better for Lucy if I had known more about cats and yeah, I think that's probably the experience of others too.

Stacy LeBaron [00:08:05]

It looks like from your bio that you've been quite involved with a couple of groups that have been involved with doing trap, neuter, return in Nebraska, here. So, you know, from your experience, what's life like being a community cat in Nebraska? What are the challenges or the successes? What are the things that you have seen in your experience?

Alison Hunter Frederick [00:08:26]

Well, one of the groups that I did volunteer with Husker Cats. It's that's a university program and when they started, I know they had several hundred cats and they're down to less than 100 now, so that providing the spay, neuter and then providing that regular, you know, the caretakers to go and give the food and the water and check on their care. That means that we, the spay/neuter, meant the population, came down, and the regular check-in, the care meant they stopped having cats who didn't look well, because there was always watching for them. That's the biggest one that I've been involved in locally. And, and for me, I think the thing I learned from it was that that's when I started using the term community cats, instead of feral cats, because when I started, I thought feral cats were these creatures that you never met, you never saw, you could never get near, and didn't realize that it could be strays, it could be indoor/outdoor cats that kind of wandered away, it could be abandoned, dumped, or it could be the ones who grew up outside. They come in all different variations, and we did foster one from Husker Cats that is now, we fostered then adopted her, and she was one that she grew up outside, but she had caretakers. So, she would let the caretakers rub her back and she loved that. That just blew my mind like, this is not what I thought of feral cat was going to be and that's kind of why I fell in love with her because this is, this is a cat who wants to be loved even though

she's outside and for her, even grew up outside. So I thought that was incredible. So Husker Cat's changed a lot of what I knew about community cats, and I think they do a great job with TNR. We also have the Cat House that does TNR across the city. I don't know the stats on it, but I know that there's a lot of teams that go and take care of them and sometimes some of the cats end up getting fostered. The ones that, you know, maybe there was a cat that they found that they TNR and then they bring to a colony or they, you know, that kind of thing. So, I think we could do a lot more, but I think we're doing pretty good too.

Stacy LeBaron [00:10:47]

Excellent, so I'm going to turn to the work that you're doing on behavior issues. And as a feline behaviorist, what are the top three issues that you see or hear when you're working with clients? What are the biggest topics that you end up dealing with?

Alison Hunter Frederick [00:11:02]

Mine is aggression. I do know. There are other cat behavior consultants that they will get a lot of the unwanted peeing, eliminating outside the box. I do get the occasional one, and but mine, usually we do a few tweaks to the environment, or they push a little bit more with their vet to get this checked and that checked. And I've had pretty good success in solving those. I don't get the really complicated unwanted peeing outside the box ones. I get out aggression. And it's ironic because when I started in the field and put it on my material, I did not list aggression. And I even said I'm not doing aggression, because I don't feel ready to do aggression. And I know others in the field who when they start, they don't do aggression, they refer them because they want other experiences, but my first cases were aggression and I've had ones where it's the cat bites the owner because maybe the cat has kind of traumatic background, doesn't feel safe, that kind of thing, and they have to build that bond, or the owners not reading the language right, not giving the resources and then I get tons and tons where the introductions went too quickly, or for whatever reason, they failed. And sometimes they did do all the steps for the introduction. It's just not realizing there's more to doing the introductions than just the steps. There's also looking at the environment, watching the body language, building the cat's confidence. So, aggression is the biggest thing I do and then I'm getting a bit into socializing the cats that have unsocialized, the ones wanting how do I help the shy cat? How do I help

my fearful cat? How do I help these sometimes shelters or rescues with how do I help these unsocialized kittens that we want to get into homes, but they're not really, we don't really know how to socialize them.

Stacy LeBaron [00:13:10]

Give your feline friend protein-packed meals, they'll crave with Smalls. Smalls is fresh human grade food for cats delivered right to your doorstep. So, you too can embrace your inner house cat. All cats are obligate carnivores. They need fresh protein packed meals. Conventional cat food is made with profits and mind, using low quality cheap meat byproducts, grains and starches coded and artificial flavors Smalls, on the other paw, is made with cats and mind. Smalls develops complete and balanced recipes for all life stages with leading cat nutritionists, starting with human grade ingredients like you or I would find at the market. Smalls recipes are gently cooked to lock in protein, vitamins, minerals and moisture. No room for fillers. No need for flavoring. Better quality ingredients mean a better healthier life for your cat. Since switching to Smalls, cats experienced improved digestion and a less smelly litter box, softer and shinier coats, plus better breath. Try Smalls today for your cats in your household. Hooch, loved it, use offer code Community Cats, at checkout, for total of thirty percent off your first order at Smalls.com. Are you ready to be part of the solution for feral and stray cats in your neighborhood? If so, then make sure to sign up for our next Neighborhood Cats TNR Certification Workshop. A new workshop is held online each month, generally on the first Saturday of the month but, please check our website for exact dates, for just \$10 expert instructors will teach you best practices for trap neuter and return, TNR. Learn what TNR is and why it works. We will cover getting along with neighbors, preparations for trapping, trapping itself, including entire colonies at once, feeding, providing winter shelter and more. Take advantage of the interactive format, extensive handouts, and video footage of actual projects. Attendees, will receive a certificate of attendance and gain access to an ongoing Facebook group for networking with other TNR activists. The two-and-a-half-hour workshop is led by Susan Richmond, the executive director of Neighborhood Cats and Brian Cortis, Neighborhood Cats national programs director to find out the date of the next workshop and sign up. Just visit communitycatspodcast.com. As we emerge from the global pandemic of covid, fostering is emerging as the new normal in the animal welfare industry, but shelter

management software doesn't provide the tools or the workflows for communicating with fosters at scale. So many organizations struggle to maintain hundreds of animals in foster homes. If only there was a system that was custom built specifically, to solve this problem and reducing foster space powered by our friends at Doobert. Foster Space was custom built to allow you to manage hundreds of foster relationships and to communicate with them via text email, and even Facebook Messenger. Your fosters have a portal where they can upload videos and photos and updates on their animals and organizations can schedule fosters for meet-and-greets, adoption days, or anything else they need. There's so much more to check out. Sign up for free at www.Doobert.com and go to the Foster Space tab to get started.

Stacy LeBaron [00:16:14]

That's really interesting. And when you're dealing with the aggression issues, is it cat to person aggression, or cat to cat, multi-cat issues, combination?

Alison Hunter Frederick [00:16:24]

I've had a few that are, you know, the biting of people including there's been kids sometimes in a situation, the mean majority would be the multi-cat. And the thing that I'm finding over, and over is usually, at least one of those cats is very insecure. And so then you have them running away from a cat and they kind of become like the prey. And so, then you have to not only get the cats comfortable with each other and smell, and, and seeing each other and interacting, but you have to build the confidence cat that's insecure. But I've also had, like I said, I've had some that are with people and those have been really special because I had one lady who she kept getting bit, but she so much did not want to return the cat. So, we kept working with her cat, building his confidence. He had come from a traumatic background, and he's doing fine now. And then I had another situation where it was a family, and they were going to euthanize the cat because they didn't think they had another option, and now the cat's, a very valued member of the family. So that's why I'm doing what I'm doing. And then I had the ones that are not. They're the multi cats, and they need the reintroductions and getting to see the cats get along, or it's really awesome. And that can be a like one- or two-month process to, it could be, I have a client who I started working with last fall who we still stay in touch because one of her cats has doesn't

have a lot of confidence and we're still working on how do we build that cat's conference?

Stacy LeBaron [00:18:03]

Right? Right. No, I mean, it's a lifetime commitment. It can be in some cases and they're also periods of time where I think, you know, you go forward and then you kind of go backward a little bit and then you go forward more. So there's a lot of it's not just like a light switch and like magically everybody is, you know, in a happy household, and also the other thing I think folks should understand too. I mean, I've had many cats. I had a cat that I rescued from our backyard. He was an unneutered male, tomcat and I, he was living under the bush of the neighbors, and I thought it was just like the neighbor's cat and I shouldn't get involved in their business. And it turned out, it wasn't their cat and, you know, he just was under the bush because they happen to be throwing dry food out randomly. And at that point in time, some of my cats were indoor/outdoor cats and he was beating up on my cats from my house and when he beat up on them and he peed all over them in and everything. And so, you know, it wasn't pretty. So for us. I got him and he was a friendly fellow. He was just he was a friendly cat, you know, the jowly tomcat and who I would of course thought was going to be FIV positive and I brought him into the vet and I got him neutered and surprisingly he didn't test FIV positive. But I mean I brought him into my household because I was like, well listen, I'm, I'm running a group. I should know what I'm doing, right? And figuring all of this out. I should be able to do this, right? So, you know, I mean, I wouldn't say it was a happy marriage, but we had a balance of power amongst, you know, the cats and that kind of thing, but I will say it was definitely not perfect through the whole period of time and we had definitely our strengths and our weaknesses. And, you know, trying to make sure, you know, we're not letting everybody outside out the same door or, you know, trying to even make sure that the outdoor territory was different because there's all this territorial stuff going on too. But yet, you know, we certainly we figured it out. But yeah, and then again he was one of those cats that, like my toddler kids at that point in time. Like they could go up and hug them and love them and squeeze him and there would be nothing from him. Where my other cat's I would have to be like, you know, if I didn't want to have to pay attention to what was going on. I'd have to separate everybody at night, just so that, then I could get my rest time in. So it's just so funny because

the personality of all of my cats were all so different. And again, going back to the fact saying, I felt like I was sort of an expert in all of this, but yet even us experts have a lot of challenges.

Alison Hunter Frederick [00:20:24]

I actually just had my own challenge in January and my husband kept encouraging me by saying you're a cat behavior consultant, it's good for you to have these experiences. It will help you sympathize with your clients, and it will also help you get more ideas for your clients. I thought I was an expert in how to handle our environment and, and I can't say it wasn't the environment but still, I never expected have a cat who would pee outside the box and then I had a cat that developed an inflamed bladder, but it also could be, you know, we did some tweaks to the environment. And we also, she now takes anti-anxiety meds, which again, I never thought I'd have a cat that we'd have to do that. She is my former feral so I can see that she could get easily stressed, but it was rough accepting that, okay, I'm a cat behavior consultant and I have a cat who took a six months to get her back to normal and also, just emotionally rough period that she would do that. And then I also have my youngest cat, has non-recognition aggression. So that thing that when you take a cat to the vet and then they return, the cats at home, can sometimes not recognize them and I do the standard thing that is popular of you know, rub the scent on the one, rub the scent on the other and that works if it's a short visit, if it's a long visit it has not worked and so I'm actually doing some like citizen science research, putting out forms finding out from people. What were your experiences? Because my experience is that the longer they're at the vet, the more issues there is going to be when they come back. And I've had to separate my cats anywhere from a couple days to a week and do many reintroductions, which is extremely stressful. So now I totally understand, my clients are doing reintroductions and when they say, I get so tired and like, when is this going to be over? It's like I get it. I know it is so stressful. But hang in there cause it'll happen and you'll figure out how to manage the environment and you'll figure out how to manage the situation. And the next time it happens, you'll be that much quicker because you know all these things to fall back on. But I get some clients who you know, they just want a pretty quick answer and I can give them some quick things and then I get others who feel like they are cat parents. I mean, this is that these are their children, their fur kids, and they're in it for

the journey. And so, whether it's, I helped them for a couple months, or whether they continue with me, and we do things for months, and months and years. They're always parenting their cats and they want to make sure they have the best for their cats, which is, that's the journey, I'm on too, being a cat parent, figuring out the best for my cats.

Stacy LeBaron [00:23:18]

So, you offer quite a range of different programs, and I know with covid everybody's become more virtual and and that kind of thing, what sort of classes or programs do you offer at this point in time?

Alison Hunter Frederick [00:23:31]

I have a monthly online, cat behavior chat that I co-host with another cat behavior consultant, and that one's actually free. People send questions ahead and we answer the questions through a Zoom chat and within an hour and it either gives people the answers they need and then the other things I have is, I have webinars where some kind of topic. The newest one I have is on fearful cats, kind of getting those unsocialized kittens to being, how do you find that house cat in them? And so like a presentation and then people get to ask a Q&A. I have interactive classes, which I think I'm fairly different in doing and I draw my teaching background and I love these classes that we meet once a week for a month and we talk about like, so if I was doing cat manners, I talk about the importance of training, talk about a particular manner to teach them, show some videos or demos, people ask questions and then they get homework and then we meet back and we look at how did people do, what were the struggles, what were the challenges? And we keep, we do that for four weeks and they can contact me in between, it's something I beta tested a lot and got a lot of feedback on and developed it based on what people said they wanted. Which is that lots and lots of feedback, which they do in the dog world, but I don't know that we do so much in the cat world yet with classes, and then I have consultations which, you know, that's the kind of standard thing for cat behavior consultants and I have people, can you do a one-hour call where they get a variety of questions answered or they can hire me for x amount of weeks, and once I talk to them and they fill out some paperwork and get some videos and see what's going on, then we meet once a week over Zoom and talk about, you know, I give them some homework, we talk about the step. How's it going? Tweak things if we need to

move forward when we're ready and I love the teaching aspect and love people seeing, love seeing the people grow, love seeing changes in the cats. And so, you know, there's so many different types of needs out there. I'm trying to meet the different types of needs for cat owners.

Stacy LeBaron [00:25:51]

Excellent. If folks are interested in finding out or signing up for your programs, for finding out about the Facebook chats. How would they do that?

Alison Hunter Frederick [00:25:58]

I have a website. And it's Alisonhelpscats.com. They can also find me on Facebook and LinkedIn, and Twitter, and YouTube. So, I'm on a lot of social media. But basically Alison at Alisonhelpscats is my website and that'll take them to anywhere they need to go to be able to contact me.

Stacy LeBaron [00:26:22]

Alison. Is there anything else you'd like to share with our listeners today?

Alison Hunter Frederick [00:26:26]

And this is the part where I will be an advocate for cats in that cats are really very smart and very affectionate. I don't think we always give them credit for how smart and affectionate they are, but they also have unique needs. So they're not the same as our dogs and not the same as there, any other, not kids. So we need to figure out what are their needs. Figure out what makes them tick, figure out what makes them most happy. They do need things during the day. They do need interactions with us and they need things to challenge them. So, sometimes it's fixing behavior, but sometimes it's just meeting those needs for what makes you thrive. What makes you have a happy life. And I think training is key to a lot of confidence. So I'm very much an advocate of giving, training cats and a lot of cat owners that I talked to once they start training they tell me why I had no idea it was so fun to train my cat, and I love this and I feel like I'm learning a new language and I'm learning new things about my cat. So just making them family members and doing everything we can to make them happy.

Stacy LeBaron [00:27:37]

That sounds great. Excellent. Alison, I want to thank you so much for being a guest on the show. And I do truly believe, I think behavior is such an important component for, for cats, for all of our cats indoor and outdoor, you know, really there, there's something for everybody out there. So thank you again, for joining me today. And we hope we have you on again in the future.

Alison Hunter Frederick [00:27:57]

And thank you for having me.

Kristen Petrie [00:28:00]

That's it for this week. Please head over to Apple Podcasts and leave a review. We love to hear what you think at 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 Podcasts, 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. Did you attend our recent Online Feline Leukemia Day? We hope you learned some new and surprising information from the presentations that will help you save more cats. Events, like Feline Leukemia Day would not be possible without the generous sponsorships of the following organizations, The Tompkins Foundation, for Feline Leukemia Advocacy, Humane Network and VetzPetz. Would you like to support content that helps support feline lives? Please visit Communitycatspodcast.com and click on Support CCP to learn more about sponsorship opportunities.