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Kristen Petrie [00:00:03]

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. Today, we're speaking with Michelle Major. Michelle is the USA Today best-selling author of over forty sexy and sweet contemporary romances. She loves second chances, love stories, smart heroines and strong heroes. A Midwesterner at heart, she's made the Rocky Mountains her home for nearly half her life and is thrilled to share her books with readers. She's also thrilled to have the opportunity to foster litters of kittens for her local rescue. Happy Cats Haven and loves to feature her babies on social media. Michelle, welcome to the show.

Michelle Major [00:01:07]

Thank you for having me, Stacy.

Stacy [00:01:09]

So, I just wanted to congratulate you, you know, on your book, but before we jump into talking about your book, I just want to find out, you know, how did you become passionate about cats?

Michelle [00:01:20]

Thanks. That is a great question. So we've always, growing up, we couldn't have cats because I had a sister who was really allergic and unfortunately, my parents decided to keep her instead of adopting some cats. So, as soon as I moved out on my own, we did, and we actually have three fur babies, fur cats of our own but a few years ago, my daughter and I volunteered at Happy Cats Haven, which is our local rescue in Colorado Springs, and my daughter also had pet buddies. I was always the house where we had snakes and geckos and guinea pigs and bunnies. And we just, anything that needed a home, we were the house that would give it, give those

animals a home but it was really sad. Her two little bonded bunnies passed away rather suddenly and she was devastated. We were all devastated and they lived in my office so, they were kind of my daily writing companions because I spend a lot of time at the computer and the kids were getting older. So I knew, you know, I wasn't ready to commit to bunnies with my kids potentially going off to college again, but I knew I needed something to make our house happy. And since we already worked with Happy Cats, I asked them about fostering and it just became such a good fit for our family. We have a couple of dogs who love the kittens and our male cat likes to adopt them. So I feel like the babies who come into our house get really well socialized. Plus, they keep me company all day.

Stacy [00:03:12]

So you are primarily a foster home of kittens. I know, everybody has their special favorites. I tended to foster the older kitties, the cats that were like ten and older and I know that there are other people who foster some of the semi-feral kitties. Do you have a specialty I guess is the question?

Michelle [00:03:28]

I would say I'm, we have done the semi-feral, the babies, though but so my, as I said, our boy cat, Moe, loves the kittens and then I have two female cats. One is very old. She's sixteen and she absolutely hates every other cat and we tried fostering adults, and she just, she would have no part of it, but the kittens are smart enough or meek enough mostly to stay away from her. So I've always said, you know, people talk a lot about being a foster fail and I've always said if our old cat Morgan bonds with one of the kittens that will be the one that we for sure keep. So, but out of respect for her because she doesn't like our two younger cats either, she's just the, you know, crotchety old woman who we dearly love but, so we mainly stick with the little ones.

Stacy [00:04:30]

So you are an author of quite a few books. You want to tell us a little bit about your journey as a novelist?

Michelle [00:04:37]

Yes. So I started, I came to romance reading and writing pretty late within the community. So a lot of romance readers started, you know, with their grandmother's,

Harlequins snuck in their room, and I didn't read my first romance novel until I was in my thirties. And I had read a lot of literary fiction and I was a journalism major and I was just stunned at how much I loved these books and also that they kind of sparked so many ideas for storylines in my own head. And I had always loved writing but I felt like I'd never kind of found my place and once I came to romance, it was like it was like being at home. But at that point, I had two babies who didn't sleep much, so it took a few years of learning the craft and sending out a lot of manuscripts, or partial manuscripts, and getting a lot of rejections before I found an agent who then sold me to, sold my book to Harlequin and I've been with them and a couple of other publishers ever since

Stacy [00:05:54]

And one of your current books has an animal theme to it or animal sheltering theme. You want to share a little bit about the story of your most recent book?

Michelle [00:06:04]

Yes. So the Last Carolina Sister features a woman who runs an animal rescue. Her name is Meredith and it's the third story in the Magnolia sisters trilogy, and it's three sisters who shared the same father, but didn't know about him until he died. And then they found out he was a bit of a philanderer, so they are three sisters who, like half-sisters, and Meredith grew up her father who raised her knew she wasn't his biological daughter and her mother left the family. So she's had some hard knocks and is pretty emotionally shut off, but with the animal rescue, I hope readers get to see a lot of her vulnerability in some different ways, with how she relates to the animals.

Stacy [00:07:03]

Can you tell us a bit about her rescue? Does she rescue cats, dogs, everything or just one species?

Michelle [00:07:11]

She does a little bit of everything. Mostly cats and dogs but again in the, in her small town of Magnolia, North Carolina, the fictional town, she's known as, you know, the animal lady. So if somebody finds a litter of kittens or a feral cat or you know, a stray dog, they know they can call her but it's kind of morphed into something where if there's a horse in need or a goat, you know, she has a real, she has a hard shell but

she has a really big heart. So she takes care of everything. But one of the storylines in the book is that she's really working on getting more funding for her animal rescue and more publicity. So I hope you know, through my work with Happy Cats, I really also wanted to shed light on, you know, the dedication of people who work with animals and how, you know, how much it takes and how much commitment and how much people sacrifice and give up. And I also hope that people will, you know, sort of be able to daydream that maybe in their own work, you know, some fantastic, hot doctor's going to show up on their doorstep ready to help.

Stacy [00:08:33]

But one of the things you're just touching upon there is sort of the sense of isolation, I mean, in her character. Whether it's because of her passion for cats, passion for animals, and you said, she's a tough nut. And there are a lot of tough nuts in the animal welfare world. I mean, there are a lot of us that probably say more to our pets than we say to our partners. And so it sounds like you're trying to encapsulate this personality that has a lot of emotional challenges and that the animals are helping her to a certain degree. And maybe that's something that's good for us all to understand in a public sphere because they're challenges that we all face.

Michelle [00:09:18]

Right. I do think there are challenges and it's sort of that old, the quote "who rescued who" I think really fits for Meredith, but also, you know, one of her lessons is accepting help. When the book opens, she's really doing it all. And you know, she runs the rescue out of farm that she owns, that the three sisters own, and you know, it's her job but it's also her passion. And I think she has sort of given up some things, you know, in regular life or been able to cut herself off because of what she's done. And so she has a lot of learning to do as far as, you know, making sure she's committed to her job and her animals but also the ability to let people in, which as an introvert and somebody who works from home in a very isolated job, I can relate to. I have full conversations with the animals and like, sometimes in my mind, they talk back to me, so.

– *Start mid-roll advertising*–

Stacy [00:10:27]

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Kristen [00:11:28]

Use offer code COMMUNITYCATS at checkout for a total of thirty percent off your first order at Smalls.com.

Stacy [00:11:35]

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 ten dollars, expert instructors will teach you best practices for trap-neuter and return, TNR. Learn what TNR is and why it works. We'll 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 Kortis, Neighborhood Cats National Programs Director. To find out the date of the next workshop and sign up, just visit communitycatspodcast.com.

Stacy [00:12:25]

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. Introducing Fosterspace, powered by our friends at Doobert. Fosterspace 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 Fosterspace tab to get started.

-End mid-roll advertising-

Stacy [00:13:16]

So in the story she meets this guy named Ryan.

Michelle [00:13:18]

Yes.

Stacy [00:13:20]

And is he as accepting of all these animals in her life? I mean, sometimes it doesn't work out that way.

Michelle [00:13:25]

You know, I don't think Ryan. So Ryan is an ER doctor who was actually injured on the job. And so he's in Magnolia to recover and he certainly has no plans to get involved with anyone, especially not the quirky animal rescue lady who lives next door. But he's also, you know, when, my husband is in the medical field, although he's not a doctor but I, we know a lot of people who again, in that profession, you give so much to your job that sometimes it affects other things. So, although he's not expecting to accept all of these animals, again, you know, animals have a way of

bringing out, I hope, the best in people and they really do, you know, bond over their kind of mutual love of these babies that she has.

Stacy [00:14:21]

That's great. It's very, very interesting to, you know, have you sort of covering animal welfare story within the story and trying to make it mainstream. Is that, you know, your real purpose in having this component to this story and have you used this in any of your other books?

Michelle [00:14:41]

You know, I haven't used particularly, I've never done a heroine who runs an animal rescue, but in this series and then the series which spins off into three more books called the Carolina Girls, the animal rescue plays a part in every story and Meredith plays a part in helping to match people with the right animals. Because I think, to me, at least with, you know, as I said, my local rescue Happy Cats, that's one of the real gifts that they're able to do is find good matches for their homes. And places, you know, it's not always this easy with some of these animals who start out with difficult lives to find them the exact right place. So I think a lot of authors have themes in their books like overarching themes. And for me, as you said in my bio, I was born and raised in Ohio, but I always knew I wanted to live near the mountains. So I moved to Colorado, on my own, by myself. I met my husband out here on a blind date. He's also from Ohio. So we both had kind of chosen this life. So I think one of my big themes is finding home. And personally, I believe an animal really makes a family or makes a person, you know, feel like they're at home.

Stacy [00:16:17]

One thing that's also interesting and people might be listening, why are you interviewing an author? What does this have to do with, you know, cats and you know, the cats that I'm feeding in the backyard. But what it is telling me is how can you take the things that you've learned from Happy Cats Haven as well as just animal welfare in general, as well as being an incredibly passionate cat lover and animal lover and bringing it into your everyday, professional life. So, how do you bring this piece of you into your profession? And yes, writing maybe an easier venue, but, you know, if you're in marketing or if you're in sales. In sales, you go on a sales call. You ask people about their cats, you know, and how are they doing? And so

there's just ways of always bringing this sort of humane animal community into our day-to-day lives, you know, and sharing with people the importance of saying trap neuter, return is a viable option. If you have cats in your backyard and understanding that trap neuter return is the way to go trap and, you know, remove and euthanize is not the way to go anymore. So using your platform as a way to make the solutions that we've been advocating for for years. It's just part of our mainstream lives.

Michelle [00:17:37]

Right. And I do think for me because I have a platform as an author and I really do use it. Part of it is that, as I said, I'm an introvert, I'm private, but I have this public platform and the kittens really help with that. They are adorable. And you know, I love to share and I feel like I am now known both in my community and in the writing community as the, you know, kitten lady because whenever I go to reader events or author events, you know, people are talking about this which is great. I appreciate the cuteness of it. But I also want people to understand, I get a lot of comments about well, I could never do anything like that because I could never let them go or I would keep all of them. And I've talked about the fact, I mean, I've posted videos of me crying when I'm dropping off, you know, a litter that we've really bonded with, you know, been through a lot with health problems. But to me, it's really important that people understand. Yes, they're cute and it's sweet, but we're also doing something to make sure these animals have the best futures they can have and I think any time you can put that into your real life and, you know, kind of meld both those things, as you were saying, I think it's really important.

Stacy [00:19:08]

So you touched upon your platform and you touched upon social media. So I have to ask you these questions because we all, well, I have a love-hate relationship with social media. I will go on the record and say that many, many times because I understand that there's a place for it in this world and we all have to embrace and love it, but we also have to control it and make sure it doesn't take our lives over. Sounds like you're very active, very present on social media. We all need to be that way with, you know, our organizations or for advocating for cats or if we're trying to raise money for cats. Do you have any tips or tricks with regards to social media for our listeners?

Michelle [00:19:44]

Yeah, you know, my biggest tip and it's one that I'm learning because, like you, you know, when you're promoting an organization, I mean I'm promoting my books and it is my career and you know, I love, my reader community are so supportive, but sometimes it's hard to you know, put myself out there and it feels a little uncomfortable but I try to remember and I'm sure within the rescue community, you know, you follow or see other people who are doing great work. And I like to think well, I like when I see what other people are doing, so I try to think of it as that way, as opposed to I'm just blatantly self-promoting myself. It's, you know, if people are interested in in my books and those kind of stories, then they're going to, they're going to relate to that. Plus I do a weekly calendar where I'm big on crossing off things, off a list. So I do put it on my calendar to make sure that I stick with it because it's part of the career.

Stacy [00:20:57]

And if you don't do it regularly, my understanding is then you lose your momentum. And so you need to commit to posting regularly or just not use that platform at all.

Michelle [00:21:08]

Yes, and I think that's it for me. I have a Twitter account, but Twitter is not my comfort space. So I really don't use that. I linked Instagram to Facebook, which is an easy thing to do so that you can post in one place and have it shown in, in others. But I would also say, you know, when you're promoting an organization, people like, that's what people like about social media is to feel connected to other people. So if you can post a behind the scenes or what goes on on a day-to-day basis, things that feel like boring when you're in it, but it's interesting to the people who are out there.

Stacy [00:21:53]

That's great. If folks are interested in getting your book, Michelle, how would they do that?

Michelle [00:21:58]

So it is available everywhere books are sold. You can find them in Target or Walmart, some grocery stores. Also on Amazon. There are links to all of the places to buy the book on my website, which is michellemajor.com. And if you want to

check me out on Instagram, I'm at Michelle Major author and Michelle Major books on Facebook.

Stacy [00:22:25]

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

Michelle [00:22:28]

I would say, you know, if you have listeners, which I'm guessing you do, who haven't tried romance, you know, give it a shot. Step outside your comfort zone in reading. I read in a variety of genres just, you know, to see different stories. And I love that escape. And also get involved in the, in the cat community because it's full of fantastic people.

Stacy [00:22:55]

Excellent. Michelle, I want to thank you so much for being a guest on my show and I hope we'll have you on again in the future.

Michelle [00:23:01]

Thank you so much.

Stacy [00:23:03]

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.

Kristen Petrie [00:23:36]

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