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Cats Shows and Breeders and Haters, oh My.

Sun, 2016-06-26 16:02 — Robin Olson

I like to think I'm open-minded. I try to give everything and everyone a chance, resisting the temptation to make a judgment about an issue based on little or no facts. With my life, via this blog, being part of the fabric of social media, I find that people are very willing to express their feelings about what experiences I've written about and can be quick to make negative comments. It gives me pause. It makes me wonder if I should not write any more or if it's worth it to constantly open myself up to a volley of negativity.

As always, I will go to my center, where my goal is simply to tell my story and through my experiences possibly educate anyone who takes the time to read these words. Success AND failure is something we learn from. My ups and downs are like anyone else's, except for that they're a lot more public and open to scrutiny.

I ask that you remain open-minded as I tell this tale because I know it's a minefield and may fill some of you with a lot of strong emotions ready to fire off, but I have to speak my peace.

It's been a very long time since I've left the house for more than a few hours, and even a longer time since I've gone anywhere overnight. As much as I love my cats and Sam, I needed a break.

I was supposed to attend an animal rescue related conference in early April, but I got the flu the day before I was to leave. I was so sick I didn't do anything for three weeks other than lay in bed and feel miserable. I was so angry, feeling robbed of my one tiny chance to get away. I cursed at the sky and asked whoever the Big Boss is, why, someone who helps others, who is so poor, who works so hard, gets the flu **the one day she is supposed to do something for herself** (*which in truth will help others since she'll learn things about rescuing cats*).

I still had one more trip to look forward to this year and I decided early on that I'd get there, no matter what. I'd been invited to attend a cat show in Massachusetts as a Guest Judge. Judge? *Cat Show Judge?* Me?

Not only that, but little Freya, our pooping-wonder-cat, was invited to be the Guest Cat! If I wanted to, I could show her in the Household Pet Cat division. Did I? **Gosh, I wasn't sure how I felt about that, but it also was an opportunity to educate people about the importance of saving the life of a cat who was deemed "un-savable."**

Freya is our Mascot after all. It's through her that we were able to help save more kittens with atresia ani and put a spotlight on the importance of helping kittens with birth defects reach a happy adulthood.

Okay. I decided to give it a try.

I know what some of you are going to be thinking, and you've already voiced your opinion on my [Facebook page](#) ^[1] about how cruel showing cats is and that any animal breeder should be punished, their animals not paraded around to the benefit of their owners and that how could I, as the President & Founder of [Kitten Associates](#), ^[2] dare do that to our Mascot, leaving her terrified in a tiny cage while waiting to be judged?

CAT SHOW

May 21 & 22 10^{am}-4^{pm}

Horgan Skating Arena
403 Oxford St N, Auburn, MA

See judging of household pet cats and many different breeds: Abyssinian, Ragdoll, Scottish Fold, Maine Coon, and more



Also shelter cats for adoption, crafts and cat toys for sale, snacks, raffle table

Special guest:
Robin A.F. Olson
writer of "Covered in Cat Hair"



Admission:

\$5 adults, \$3 children over 5 & seniors, under 5 free

with Facebook favorite:

I'd have to admit that before I attended the cat show, I did have reservations. Sure, I'd been to cat shows plenty of times before, but only to *ooh* and *ahhh* over the pretty pedigreed felines and buy cat toys. I thought about how many cats are in kill-shelters, how many are starving and dying horrible deaths and that cat breeders just made the problem worse by adding more cats to the population problem.

I'd heard stories about breeders euthanizing cats that weren't up to Standards, or not breeding their cats responsibly and causing birth defects or genetic health issues, then selling the cats for twisted amounts of money under the guise that they were healthy and robust.

I'm sure that there are those of you who know every fact and figure to prove the point that breeding should be outlawed completely, so how dare I spend the weekend at a cat show, showing my little cat in the Household Pet Cats ring?

There's a lot more going on here than meets the eye.

Firstly, there is no black and white about cat shows and breeders being all good or all bad. There are degrees of both states, just like in anything else. I did a lot of thinking about this topic as I walked around the show floor. I wanted to hate the breeders and be pro-cat-rescue, blinders firmly in place.

But then there were the cats.

Holy shit they were stunning. **I thought about what the world would be like if no one preserved or created new breeds of cats** (like the Napoleon who I just saw this weekend who was so cute I practically melted or the mind-blowingly magnificent orange Maine Coon with paws as big as my hands).



©2016 Robin AF Olson. Baccaruda, one of my new BFFs gets shown. He is all fluff, all the time.

What if we DID outlaw breeding and all we had were what I usually see in my rescue-world— an assortment of tabbies, gray cats, lots and lots of black cats, fluffy cats, orange cats, calicos or torties, but I wouldn't see a magnificent, mellow-minded Birman, with big white mitts, sapphire blue eyes and chocolate coloring that fades along the abdomen and darkens at the paws. I wouldn't see a delicately proportioned, trouble-making, Singapura^[3] with a ticked coat and pale green alien-like eyes who had so much energy she was practically vibrating.

What goes beyond looks is that these cats are also bred for temperament. Some are chosen for being curious and playful, while others are gentle giants. I never know what I'm going to get when I rescue a cat. Usually they're sick, thin, full of fleas. When they feel better, they can sometimes become pretty obnoxious, while others might become fearful once they're strong enough to show their true nature. I work hard to help them become confident and loving, but if they were genetically predisposed to be sweet and I knew that ahead of time, gee, there is something to be said for that.

I'm not looking to start a big argument about what is right or wrong, but I am hoping that maybe some of you will just be open-minded enough to think about a world without purebred cats and focus your anger on anyone who is cruel to animals, **period**.

Do I love that these cats are sold for crazy amounts of money? **No**.

Do I love that there ARE some cats who are stressed out of their minds and should not be shown. **NO!**...but we'll talk more about that in my next post because I did see some pretty amazing changes in the cats as they quickly acclimated to their surroundings (*including Freya*).



©2016 Robin AF Olson. Stunning Maine Coon KITTEN.

That said, I would never condone making a cat miserable just so I could show him or her off and I am clear in the fact that there are breeders who do horrific things to their cats in the name of the almighty dollar.

Then there's something I'm not sure many folks consider. There are a few people who do the cat shows who would otherwise have little or no contact with anyone in society. They use their cats as bridge so they can be comfortable around others. It gives them reason to get out of their home, socialize, and make friends when they probably can't do that very well in their day-to-day life. I honestly think it improves their mental health.

Is it right that cats could be seen as being used to help humans? Well then what about service dogs? Horses? Police dogs, bomb-sniffing dogs, cancer-sniffing dogs, therapy cats? Is it so different that some of these cats provide their guardians with a feeling of safety and security in social settings?

And lastly, when you look at any cat, what's one of the first things you do after cooing over how cute it is? **You try to sort out what breed it might be.** I think it would be a sad world if we were reduced to describing our cats, as, well, cats or by color or fur pattern alone.



©2016 Robin AF Olson. Freya "helps" me pack up for our trip.

Slowly, over generations of not preserving breeds, we'd end up with a mixed bag of cats, who have no interesting personality traits that we can count on and probably less and less remarkable coloring or characteristics. I'm not sure what the impact would be on over-crowded shelters because the sort of people who don't spay/neuter their cats isn't going to change. Yes, some unscrupulous breeders dump their pet-quality kittens or adults at shelters, *but my gut tells me the folks who don't spay/neuter their cats or give kittens away for free on Craigslist without them being vetted are a bigger concern.*

As humans, it's in our nature to categorize, identify and create. Over the millennia, we have come to do that with our cats, too. We have bred cats who are sweet lap cats and cats who are glorious athletes. Just as humans are diverse, so are our cats. Do we really want to get rid of cat breeds because some breeders are rotten apples? Do we really want to close down cat shows because some of the cats experience stress for a few hours? **How many cats are in homes that experience stress 24/7 due to their guardians behavior or suffer stress from the other pets in the home because they were not introduced properly or don't have appropriate places to flee when they experience fear?**

While I can't say I love every aspect about breeding cats, maintaining a standard, or cat shows, I can say that after being part of one I see value I couldn't see before. I hope you can, too.

So, yeah, I judged a cat show, but first, I had to get there and let me tell you, **THAT** was a story in and of itself.



©2016 Robin AF Olson. Anti-lock brake, brake and traction control warning lights come on 12 hours before I have to drive to MA. Do I stay home or risk driving a car that's about to crap out on me?

Next up...**the trip from HELL**, in a hateful car, with a dead phone and no way to navigate my way out of a horrific traffic jam where I was traveling at a blazing 4 MPH. *How determined was I to get away for a few days after all?* Maybe I should have just stayed home?

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