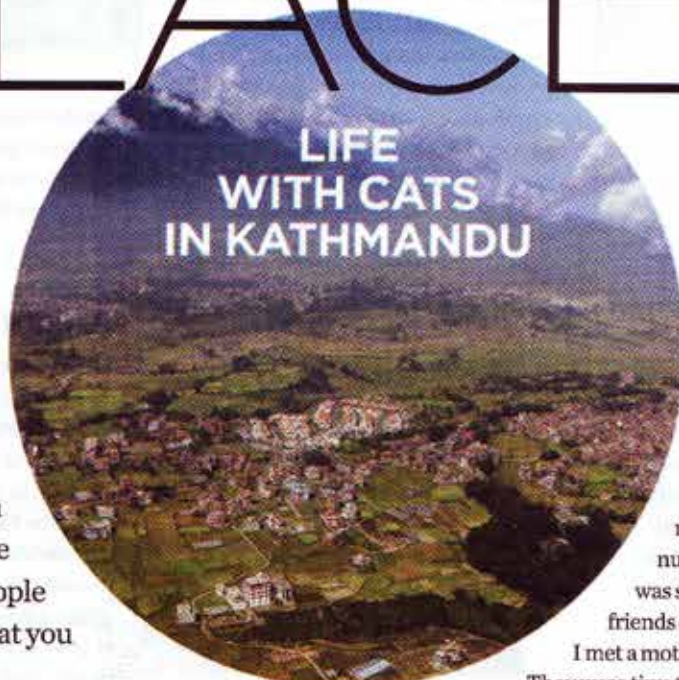


# FAR AWAY PLACES



LIFE WITH CATS IN KATHMANDU

“YOU HAVE CATS?”

My friend’s eyes widened in shock.

“Yes,” I replied happily. “Three of them!”

She leaned in, concern on her face. “You should be careful. It’s dangerous. People can use black magic to get at you through your cats.”

I must have looked as disbelieving as I felt, because she continued: “It’s true. It’s happened in my own family.”

Having lived in Kathmandu for 16 years now, I knew that many Nepalis don’t care for cats, but since adopting Norman and Margaret, I was getting a crash course in local cat lore. I just hadn’t expected it from this well-traveled, cosmopolitan woman.

I’ve since learned many local sayings and superstitions that I’d never heard before. Some friends were so scared on seeing Norman and Margaret that I had to move them to another room. A favorite Nepali proverb, which made me laugh, goes: “A dog will cry at your death, but a cat will rejoice in anticipation of the funeral feast.”

## Unique Challenges

When I first decided to get a cat, I had no idea where to start. In all my years in Nepal I had seen a cat only once, while trekking in the Everest area.

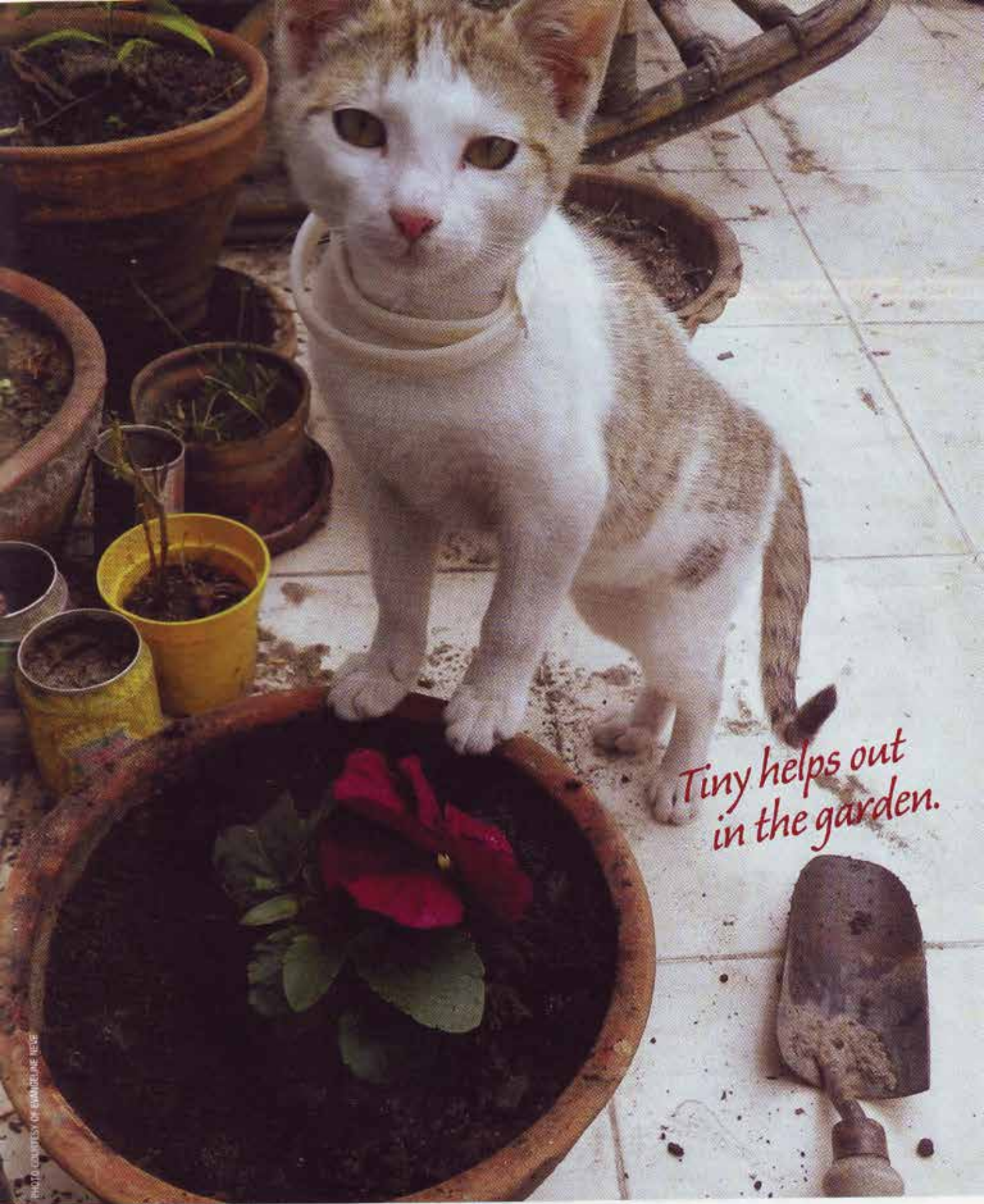
Once I saw a sign, “Black kittens need home!” But when I called the number, they were already gone. It was several months later, while visiting friends on a farm outside Kathmandu, that I met a mother cat and her sweet litter of four.

They were tiny, their eyes not even open, but I told my friends I’d love one when they got older.

Two months later, my friends called. Did I want the two remaining kittens? Sisters Norman and Margaret came home that day, firmly planting themselves at the center of my life. They are affectionate and interactive, and whoever says that cats are aloof and reserved should come and meet mine. Being owned by cats has made me happier than I ever thought possible. And I’ve since found that there are a lot more cats in Nepal than I’d previously thought. Tiny and Jack have recently joined our family from a rescue shelter, and in my new house a procession of stray cats visit my garden for food and care.

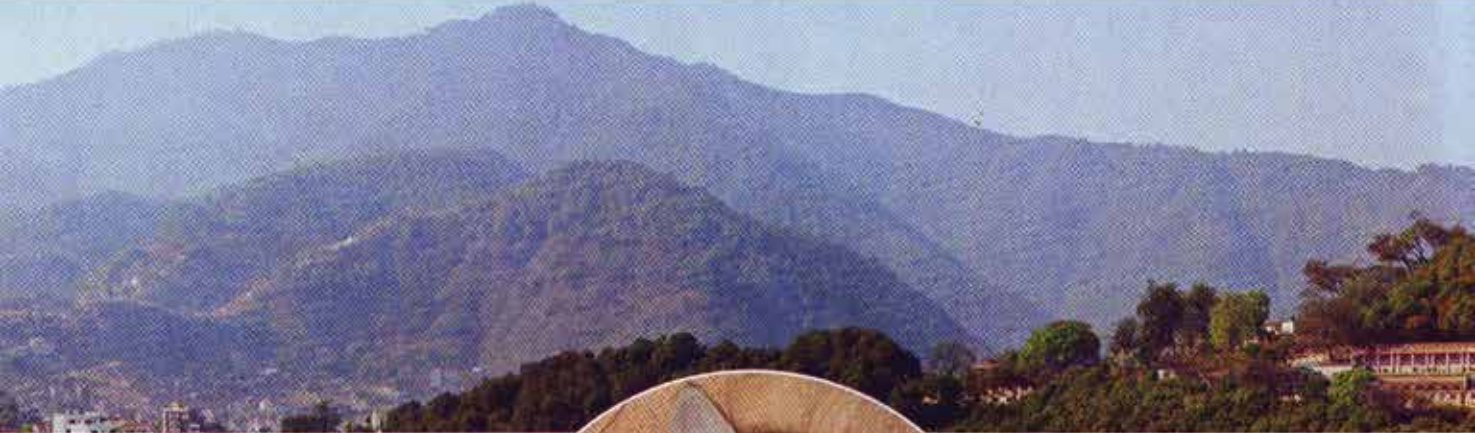
I’ve also faced a set of unique challenges. Nepal is a landlocked country, and many products are flown or trucked in from China or India. This leads to regular shortages of staples and grocery items; if you’re smart you’ll keep some extra salt, sugar and other basic needs handy, just in case.

I soon found this applied to pet supplies, too. Kitty litter comes into the supermarkets in waves, with stacks available and then, abruptly, none to be found for weeks or months. I’ve had to resort to using regular sand when all my stocks ran out during a low supply time, which did not impress my girls in the least.



*Tiny helps out  
in the garden.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF CAMERON JANE HESSE



Worse was when food ran out. This happened on a large scale only once — usually it's available again within several weeks, and I keep plenty on hand to cover that. Last year, though, cat food vanished from stores for nearly two months. After using everything I'd saved, visiting every shop and buying every bit I could find, Norman and Margaret graciously tolerated homemade food for a few weeks. When I was finally able to buy their favorite brand again, you should have seen them run when they heard the packaging rustle.



**Margaret and Norman when they first came to live with Neve (above); Synchronized sleeping (at right)**



### Learning To Adapt

The most important character trait you need when keeping a pet in a country like Nepal is adaptability. The cats might not benefit from the same standard of living as they would in the U.S., but as long as they are warm, fed and loved, they're happy. The rest are just extras.

Second, you need a good veterinarian. If you should be so lucky, you'll find some like Drs. S.P. Gautam and N.P. Ghimire

whose clinic is a short distance from where I live. It's small and spare, but clean. They are knowledgeable and, most importantly, they are sincerely caring and honest. They thoroughly explain ex-

actly what the situation is and what you can expect.

I learned to really appreciate my veterinary clinic when Norman had an accident during a local holiday, and my doctors were unavailable. I was directed to a government veterinary hospital across town. As I waited in the cavernous entrance I saw an ancient signboard with prices listed in Nepali for animal consultations. Prices for chickens and elephants were there along with cats, dogs and other animals. The tables were streaked with blood and feces. While I'm grateful for the urgent care Norman received that day, I am much more thankful I never have to return there again.

**KITTY LITTER COMES INTO THE SUPERMARKETS IN WAVES, WITH STACKS AVAILABLE AND THEN, ABRUPTLY, NONE TO BE FOUND FOR WEEKS OR MONTHS. I'VE HAD TO RESORT TO USING REGULAR SAND.**

Third, you must plan for the future. I'm in Nepal for the long term, but if that should change, I know I'll have to shell out for veterinary certificates and airfares, because I'm not leaving my cats behind. I've seen numerous notices on bulletin boards: "Leaving next month and need home for beloved pet."

Except in the case of an emergency, it's always best to take your pets with you or try to seek out a home among friends you know. Having an animal in your life, is a long-term commitment.

Earlier this year I moved to a new house, and the same week, Margaret slipped out of the door and ran away. Days became weeks, and it seemed we'd lost her for good. Cats have

been known to travel many miles and return to their original homes — and, in at least one recorded case, across continents from Asia to Europe. But although I combed my old neighborhood, searching, calling and asking people, I had no luck. Six weeks later, I received a call from my old neighbor. I rushed over, and there was Margaret: thin and ravenous, but completely healthy.

As Dr. Ghimire gave her a rabies booster, he held her, crooning, "What a clever cat you are. More than one month — no people, no food, no medicine, but you have survived. So brave. So clever."

They are all of that and more. I couldn't imagine life without them. 🐾

*Evangeline Neve has lived in Nepal since 1996. She works with underprivileged children and also writes. She loves cats, cooking, travel and reading. Since the cats have come into her life she spends much less time roaming and more time at home in Kathmandu with a kitty on her lap, writing.*



*Checking out the  
neighborhood*