

Cat Wills & Trusts

**Make sure your pet is provided
for after you're gone.**

BY JENNIFER
WILLIAMS, PH.D.

People who share their lives with cats often agonize over their care, but it's likely that not many cat owners think about what will happen to their pets after they're gone. Even if old age isn't a concern for you, accidents or illnesses can take you away unexpectedly from your cat. What will happen to your pet?

"If you are lucky, a family member or friend will care for your cat," says

Sara Silverman, an attorney in Aiken, S.C. But your cat also could end up at a shelter or euthanized. According to Silverman, this can happen because your cat is considered personal property (just like a television is) and goes to whoever gets items that aren't left to someone specific. To keep your cat safe, plan for its care after you are gone.

Leave Your Cat to Someone

Your will can specify who inherits your cat as well as include money for its care. Your will cannot force that person to care for your cat, however, so he or she could keep the money and put your cat in a shelter. Before leaving your cat to someone, talk to the person and make sure he or she knows and likes your cat, understands any health or behavioral problems your cat might have and is willing to provide your cat a home for life. Designate a backup person in case the original person is unavailable if and when the time comes.

When leaving your cat to someone in your will, you can work with an estate planning attorney or use a standard will. ItsMyLife.com offers a will that's legally binding in many states and includes pet provisions. The site also offers a "Pets Letter of Wishes," which allows cat owners to detail exactly how they want their cats cared for. (The Letter is not a legally binding document but rather informative guidelines for the caregiver.)



FIONA GREEN

To keep your cat safe, plan for its care after you are gone.

Rescues, Sanctuaries and Lifetime Care Facilities

If you don't know someone trustworthy and willing to care for your cat, consider a cat rescue, sanctuary or lifetime care facility.

Some rescues take in cats whose owners have died, evaluate the cats' temperaments and needs, and find them loving homes. Each rescue operates differently, so check out potential rescues to make sure you agree with their policies on placing cats in new homes.

Some rescues only accept cats when they have space and might not have room when the time comes. Others offer guaranteed placement programs.

Cat sanctuaries and lifetime care programs are another option. PetGuardian (www.petguardian.com) and 2nd Chance 4 Pets (www.2ndchance4pets.org) list programs that provide cats with homes for life at their facilities. Some require enrollment fees, while others require that owners bequeath them money in their wills to care for the cats.

Before selecting a rescue, sanctuary or lifetime care facility, talk to the program manager and discuss the organization's guidelines for accepting cats. Ask whether the organization places cats in new homes or keeps them for life. Determine how the program decides when to euthanize its cats, and discuss what veterinary care it provides. Arrange a visit so you can see where your cat will live and how the program will care for it.

Pet Trusts

Rachel Hirschfeld of New York created The Hirschfeld Pet Trust™ and The Pet Protection Agreement™. She says that one of the most important things to consider when setting up a pet trust is to ensure your cat gets the same level of care for its entire life, even if you are unable to provide care due to injury, illness or death. "A well-written pet trust keeps your cat with you, even if you are ill or incapacitated, and it provides for your cat's care," Hirschfeld says. This means your cat will stay with you as long as you are alive, even if you can't care for it, and will be provided for once you are gone.

Currently, pet trusts are legal in 38 states and in the District of Columbia. A pet trust is a legal arrangement in which you name a caregiver, designate money for your cat's care and specify a trustee to administer the trust: giving

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT
OF

money to the caretaker and ensuring that the caregiver follows your instructions. In some states, pet trusts are "honorary," meaning they provide no real protection, as the caretaker has the option to care for your cat or not. Other states offer legally enforceable pet trusts. Hirschfeld has developed the Pet Protection Agreement™ (patent pending) which includes a will, trust and contract with the future caregiver that gives specific instructions for your cat's care.

Since state laws vary, you need an attorney to interpret the law and set up a pet trust to protect your cat. Stacey L. Romberg, an estate planning attorney in Seattle, recommends that you know who you would like to serve as a trustee as well as a caregiver before you visit an attorney and that you discuss your plans with them to ensure they're able and willing to fulfill their responsibilities.



CatChannel Exclusive!

Plan for your cat's care after you're gone.

For a handy checklist, go to www.CatChannel.com/Exclusives

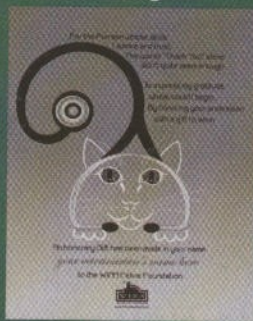
"First, be careful in funding the trust to make sure adequate funds exist for your cat's needs," Romberg says. "The possibility of additional end-of-life medical expenses should be considered in determining the amount of money placed into trust. Second, if your cat dies before all trust funds are expended, the trust should describe how the remaining funds should be distributed. Finally, remember to update your will as needed. If your pet dies and you get a new one, your trust may need to be revised."

As a cat owner, you want to keep your pet safe. Research your options, and make sure your cat is cared for — even if you aren't here to do it. ○

Jennifer Williams, Ph.D., is a freelance writer from Alvin, Texas. She runs Bluebonnet Equine Humane Society and shares her home with four rescued cats.

When the words *Thank You* alone

don't quite seem enough...



To add the special purrson(s) in your cat's healthcare team to Winn's Veterinary Honor Roll, please visit: WinnFelineHealth.org
Founded by CFA in 1988



Honor Your Vet



Dedicated to the Health and Welfare of All Cats

Winn Feline Foundation is a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Entity

Pumpkins, Witches and Black Cats

Halloween conjures up many spooky images, such as haunted houses, ghosts, witches and black cats. Black cats? How did our feline friends end up on the list of scary Halloween creatures?

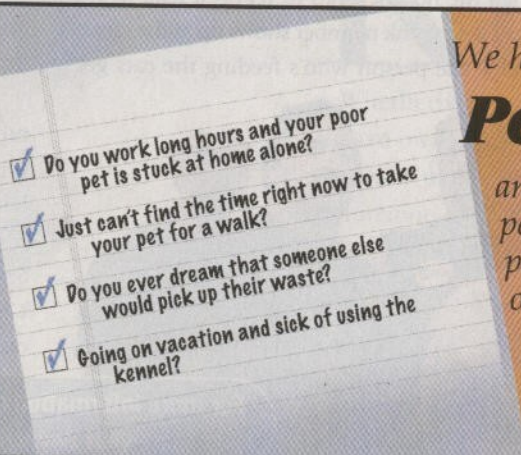
Though there are many theories, the most prevalent suggests that black cats first became associated with evil when Christianity rose in popularity in medieval Europe, and the Church denounced pagan religions, including those that involved witchcraft. Many people believed that black cats were witches' familiars, and some believed that witches or the devil could take the form of a cat.

As recently as the 17th century, during the Salem witch trials, cats also were persecuted because of their association with witchcraft. Cats' uncanny ability to see and hunt well in the dark reinforced the idea that they had supernatural powers. And so it is theorized that, in the United States, the association of black cats with witchcraft and evil has ingrained them as a permanent part of our Halloween traditions.



Regardless of the source of these superstitions, Halloween can be a dangerous time for black cats to roam outdoors. For their safety and longevity, CAT FANCY advocates keeping cats indoors year-round, but especially on this holiday, which can provoke cruel people to mistreat black cats.

— Ruth MacPete, DVM



We have an alternative, visit

PetSitFinder

and find a **.com** pet sitter, pet walker, pooper scooper, or pet boarding near you.



Pet Sit Finder