

Muzzy was a good cat. He ruled the household and the two dogs for about 15 years. When he was an old cat, he developed a wobble in his back quarters, but it never caused him any pain, and he went about his feline business with very little change. He still intimidated the two border collies. They liked him, but an occasional nip from his sharp teeth made him a feared enforcer. They were careful around him.

Muzzy still went on an occasional hunt this past spring. He was like an old deer hunter who was no longer really able to walk, shoot, or dress a buck, but who still put on the old hunting clothes, got out the gun, and bought a license.

In recent years, Muzzy began hunting close to the house. He would venture a little way outside our fenced in yard, but he wouldn't be gone long, and I could almost always spot him from the cabin.

On May 13th, the old cat begged for treats, as usual, sat on my lap after breakfast, and bossed the dogs. Later that forenoon, he asked to go outside, and I saw him disappear in the tall grass at the edge of our yard.

He did not come back as he usually did. I called, but got no answer. I tried off and on as the day went on, and I began to wonder if he was lying sick or hurt somewhere. In mid afternoon, I spied him. He had died suddenly in the midst of his outing, and lay peacefully a few meters from the yard. He had lived and died on his own terms. There was nothing to feel sorry about concerning this old cat's life.

But, we still missed him. There is nothing quite like a cat on the lap, a cup of tea, and a warm cabin on a cold morning. And, he provided us with entertainment, rodent control, and dog-sitting. I did not want to remain "catless" for long.

We have too many barn cats. But, a house cat is something different. Finally, this past week, I brought two barn kittens to the cabin. They are siblings, good, plain cats. There is nothing particularly noteworthy about their looks. One is bright orange, the other is very dark, striped, and with some white on his face and chest. Both have little white tips on their tails.

They were very wild, but they began to settle down in a day or so, and though they are still hard to catch, they purr and seem to want to be in our vicinity. The biggest challenge is civilizing the relationship between them and the border collies. I think it will work in time, but right now, I am afraid that any interaction might result in one bite and a dead kitten. They are only loose in the cabin when the dogs are outside. Otherwise, the kittens are banished to the basement where they seem to be satisfied pursuing their own agenda. Right now, they are in the cat carrier with two dogs looking on.

These kittens now have names. It took a few days for their identities to reveal themselves. But, it is now clear that their names fit. The orange kitten is Jick. This is the name of one of my favorite characters in the novels of one of my favorite authors. Ivan Doig wrote several books that featured Jick MacCaskill, a redheaded Montanan of Scottish descent.

The striped kitten is Tony. We named him after Dr. Fauci, and his liveliness and pure athleticism seem to be a lot like that physically small, but knowledgeably and competently large, medical hero. These little kittens seem to fit their names.

We will see how this relationship works out. The main challenge is Kate, sitting in black and white glory right now with her eyes fixed on the cat carrier, and Blue, her azure gaze firmly eyeing a confined kitten.