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Buster the Beloved Pussycat

By Janette Blackwell

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"Dogs have owners; cats have staff," and I have worked for some wonderful cats in my time. The one I loved best was named Buster. Buster had an unusual mind. He didn't think like other cats; he didn't act like other cats. Maybe that's why I loved him so.

We got Buster from the county animal shelter. We usually get our cats from the county animal shelter. That way we save a life -- and we've gotten some great cats that way. One fall, after our cat had died and left a big hole in our lives, we went to the animal shelter for a kitten. There were no kittens.

I was about to give up, but my husband Bill kept saying, "That one over there looks good." And he did. He was about three-quarters grown, grey and white, and had a sweet, hopeful expression on his little face. Also, he was scheduled to be killed the next day. There was no time for us to go home and meditate on the matter.

We went to the people in charge and said, "We'll take that one."

As we and the cat rode home, Bill picked out his name. We take turns naming our cats, and it was Bill's turn. "We'll call him Buster," he said.

"Buster?"

"When you're mad at me, you say, 'See here, Buster,' and I'd like to have someone else around named Buster."

When we got Buster home, he of course had to inspect the house. After a brief look around, he went into my mother's bedroom, where the sun was shining warmly on her pink bedspread. He jumped onto the bed and promptly went to sleep in a patch of sunlight, sprawled out on his back, paws up, the way a cat sprawls when he's feeling completely safe and happy.

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"Home at last," he was saying. "Home at last."

"Buster Is Welcomed To The Neighborhood"

At our house Buster had food available around the clock, but he must have been hungry as a kitten, because he didn't think of the other houses in our neighborhood as unfriendly. He thought of them as snack bars.

I later discovered that he got a slice of bologna from Pearl Cesare every morning around ten. He got milk from Bert Pigge shortly thereafter. Then he jumped onto a chair — Bert had an especially desirable one — and had a nap.

Buster was a successful entrepreneur from the start.

The other cats welcomed Buster to the neighborhood by hissing and snarling and letting him know he was in THEIR territory and he'd better get out. Well, Buster didn't get out. He didn't even get worried. I don't know why; he just didn't.

Then came the heavy artillery: the neighborhood's reigning tomcat.

I heard a noise like a furious air-raid siren coming from the back yard. I looked out the window to see the huge reigning black-and-white tom crouched a few feet from Buster, making one of the world's most menacing sounds. But Buster didn't seem worried. He listened politely. Then he noticed an autumn leaf spinning down toward him. The wind blew the leaf around the corner of the house, and Buster followed after it, leaping and pawing the leaf as it spun.

The bewildered tom sent a few more air-raid siren noises into empty air. Then he fell silent. At last he wandered off in another direction.

After that Buster was accepted as a neighborhood cat in good standing.

"Buster and I Rise and Shine"

Buster woke me in the morning by bouncing on my waterbed. I would dream I was in a small boat in a choppy sea. And gradually wake to find Buster leaping straight up in the air and briskly landing on all fours on the waterbed. KER-THUMP, KER-SLOSH. KER-THUMP, KER-SLOSH. The waterbed waves grew higher and higher as Buster briskly bounced . . . until, groggy and seasick, I rolled onto solid ground.

"Buster And The Essential Kindness of Automobiles"

Buster believed in the essential kindness of people and automobiles. When summer arrived, I began hearing cars honk in front of the house. And looked out to see Buster waking from a nap, which nap was taking place in the middle of the street: he found the sun-warmed black pavement ideal for that purpose. Fortunately ours was not a through street; drivers were honking at Buster and waiting for him

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to leisurely wake up and move out of their way. But how long could that last?

Whenever I saw Buster napping in the street, I yelled at him to get out. To which he paid no attention. I had to go into the street, pick up his warm, luxuriously limp body, and carry him indoors.

And the next day I'd hear a car honking again.

"Why didn't you keep him indoors, you idiot?" you are thinking.

Well, with 20/20 hindsight I know I should have. But I hoped that the honking cars would teach Buster not to sleep in the street. They would have taught any other cat.

And, while I dithered, came the heartbreaking day when Buster didn't return from his happy neighborhood rounds.

I of course made inquiries --- and learned about his tours of the home snack bars.

But he hadn't been to any of them that day.

I asked a group of kids if they had seen Buster.

"Is he the cat who chases cars?" they asked.

And then I recalled a half-forgotten memory: that of a little grey and white figure bounding joyously in the wake of an automobile.

"That's him," I said.

But they had not seen him lately either.

I will never know for certain what happened to Buster, but clearly he trusted in the essential kindness of people and automobiles one time too many.

Find Janette Blackwell's hilarious cookbook, "Steamin' Down the Tracks with Viola Hockenberry," at

Yahoo! Does It Again... But We're Not Sure What `It' Is!

By Eddie SanMarco

If you've searched with Y! lately - at least in some browsers - you may have noticed a new addition to their search result's page. If you use Netscape or Firefox, the upper right-hand corner of your search result's page now holds an orange box that holds - The Buzz. Yahoo!'s Buzz Log has been around for a few years, but you used to have to go looking for it to find out what people were Buzzing about. Now Y! puts it in your face - and frankly, I'm not sure what all it's good for.

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For those of you who aren't up to speed on the Yahoo Buzz, here's a quick recap. Every day, Yahoo records all the searches that are entered on its pages. Over the next twenty four hours, those searches are indexed, tabulated, calculated and sorted, and the next day - 48 hours later - Y! publishes 'the Buzz Index' in a number of different forms. Want to know what was on people's minds two days ago? You can get a quick snapshot by checking today's Buzz Index page. There's a Buzz Index for entertainment, movies, music, sports, movie stars and overall. But what's it all mean? Here it is straight from the horse's mouth:

A subject's buzz score is the percentage of Yahoo! users searching for that subject on a given day, multiplied by a constant to make the number easier to read. Weekly leaders are the subjects with the greatest average buzz score for a given week.

So... it's an index of the most popular searches on Yahoo! The Buzz publishes daily, weekly and monthly stats, so you can track trends over time. You can even get a subscription to the Yahoo Buzz Index and personalize it with customized search terms - but those don't show up in your search results page when you do a search—you have to go to your Buzz Index page for them. What does show up is the top ten general daily searches. In fact, for today, no matter what I'm actually searching for, here's what I get in that little box:

1.pussycat dolls 2.NFL draft grades 3.the ultimate fighter 4.may 1 boycott 5.Madonna tickets
6.Howard stern 7.Chinese astrology 8.project runway 9.Terence Howard 10.Bahamas hotels

So exactly what is the point of plopping that orange box in one of the prime pieces of SERP real estate? It doesn't tell me anything relevant to my search (I searched for test scores, for nursing degrees and for consumer index). If I click on one of the ranked items, it feeds me the search results for that term. If I click on 'More Buzz' at the bottom, it takes me to the Buzz Index where I can read the latest blog entry.

To make it even more useless, the Buzz box only works in a few browsers. In the others, there's either a blank column - or the Sponsor Results - which at least are contextually related to what I'm searching. Where's the value added? About the only thing that it does is clutter up a space that could be used so much more profitably.

Now if Y! wanted to actually make this thing useful, here are a few suggestions.

First - make it contextually sensitive. If I type in a search for 'tests,' I'd find a list of related popular searches a WHOLE lot more useful than knowing that most of America is searching for info on the Pussycat Dolls two days ago.

Second, never mind the ranking - give me the numbers! How many people searched for Pussycat Dolls? Maybe it's something I should know about, hmm?

Third - move it! I don't refer to that place as 'prime real estate' for nothing. The upper right hand corner of your browser is one of the first places the eye lands on a page. It's one of the reasons that you put important things in that space when you're designing your pages. Why waste it?

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