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Web's Cat Home Pages Convey Complex Human-Feline Ties

By STEVE DITLEA

Touring the scores of personal home pages for cats reminds a visitor of another world-wide web -- the myriad strands of emotion and intellect that bind humans and their furry roommates. In cyberspace, as in life, cats intrigue us, mock us, mirror our concerns and submit to our wonderment and worship.



On the Web, it turns out, dogs remain more popular, at least as measured by Yahoo!'s search service. Most recently, Yahoo! listed 152 individual dog pages, while cat pages numbered 140. Still, [Yahoo!'s Individual Cats](#) list, complete with annotations, is one of the best places to begin a tour of feline sites. This page's only drawback is its large number of broken links, testimony to constant changes on the Web. An even more extensive list of more than 500 [Individual Cat Pages](#), includes the names of humans owned by these felines.

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Yes, it's anthropomorphism run amuck. There is a tendency on the Web to personify cats, to narrate their pages as if the cats themselves were writing them.

For example, [Molly the Cat's Homepage](#), begins "Greetings! I am Molly the Cat . . . or as I prefer to be called, Molly the Princess."



"I like to imagine the world through her eyes," said Molly's owner, Colleen Bouchard, an insurance company consultant. Bouchard has six other cats in her rural Connecticut home, but only Molly has a home page (though her two German Shepherds share a page of their own). "It's going to her head," Bouchard said of Molly's home page. "She gets more e-mail than I do."

One of the Web's most cat-anthropomorphizing pages is titled [Getting the Credit Your Cats Deserve](#) -- and the title is more literal than you might suspect. It is illustrated with two gold credit cards issued to the page's narrator, a black cat named Kangaroo.

After Joe Rizzo, an office manager in Illinois, registered computer software in his cat's name, Kangaroo started receiving unsolicited credit card applications. Rizzo decided to fill in the applications. "I was scrupulously honest in giving information like Roo's household income," he recalled, "and where they required a signature, I put in a paw print." Most companies turned down the applications, but Chemical Bank and Mellon Bank saw fit to issue cards. Even so, Kangaroo laments to other cats at the bottom of this page: "The odds are that the people you live with won't let you carry your credit cards around. Just one more example of humans thinking they are better than you."



In another example of online species-bending, [Madison the Genius Cat](#)'s home page offers catty psychic advice in response to humans' and first-person felines' e-mailed questions. "It was the first Web site I ever designed," said Andrew Keeler, a San Francisco graphic artist. "It's gotten me a lot of work as a Web designer." Madison receives about five questions a day, of which Keeler will answer only the most interesting. For instance, when someone identifying himself as John asks, "Why are most cats self-centered?" Madison responds, "Just because I like to eat and get lots of attention and only worry about myself, doesn't make me a bad cat."

Home pages of the purr-prone can obsess on just about any issue, including weight problems. Take Tazzie, alias [The Big Kitty](#). Now down to a svelte 18 pounds (from the 20 pounds posted on his home page), he still "goes anywhere and does whatever he wants." Eric Garris, senior desktop publishing manager for Nurseweek magazine, said that Tazzie's home page, at 6,000 hits a day, is out-weighted by the 10,000 hits going to one of his two other cat sites, [Kramer's Home Page](#), a site devoted to a feline identified as a Maoist Black Panther.

At 26 pounds in his online version, the subject of [The Hank Home Page](#) seems the rightful claimant to the title of Heavyweight Cat of the Web. In real life, Hank is currently up to 28 pounds.

"We're trying to get him to lose weight, but he was a big boy as a kitten," said Jim Mancusso, who produces entertainment for corporate events with performances by the Captain and Tenille.

As a "semi-professional" Web designer, Mancusso posted Hank's page on the same server as the site he designed for 70's pop celebrities Daryl Dragon and Toni Tenille. (Elsewhere on the Web, a claim to being [Biggest Cat on the Internet](#) bears a comically exaggerated montage of feline and humans, "drawn to scale.")

Appropriately, there are home pages celebrating cats brought together with their humans by the Web. For instance, [Petit Robert's Page](#) was posted by Brendon Lynch, a Massachusetts-based Sun Microsystems software engineer who found his purebred Chartreux kitten after perusing the Web's cat fancier and cat breeder pages. Petit Robert was available from a California cat breeder who was also a Sun employee.

"Without the Web, it would have been much harder to find a cat like this," Lynch explained. "I would have had to go to local cat shows, drive to see local breeders, and I wouldn't have ended up with Petit Robert."

Welcome To Hank's WebPage



Other cats on the Web would almost certainly not be alive today if not for the Net. Karen O'Brien's page for [Our Special 3-Legged Friend -- Evelyn](#) tells of her rescue of a 10-week-old kitten that had just been run over on the freeway near San Francisco. A breeder of American Curl cats new to the area, she went online to seek veterinarian referrals from the Cat Fanciers' E-mail List, distributed to 400 feline professionals. "They not only gave me advice; they came up with donations that paid for about half the vet costs when Evelyn's leg had to be amputated," recalled O'Brien, now a public relations specialist for Siemens' UNIX computer division.



Chaya

Credit: Susan Jurist

Cat pages can also be a source of comfort to those whose pets are afflicted with a disease. [Bear's and Nali's FeLV Web Site](#) celebrates three stressed but happy years with two cats infected with the virus that causes feline leukemia. "I'd like to think we've saved the lives of some cats whose owners might not have kept them once they tested FeLV-positive," says Toni Marie Labnow, an administrator at the University of California at Berkeley. "I've been able to share my experience of caring for FeLV cats with over 100 owners via e-mail since the site went up."

As for Bear and Nali, she said, "they're both doing fine now."

Eventually, death must come even to those of us with nine lives, at which time cat home pages become cat memorials.

Susan Jurist, an art librarian at the University of California at San Diego, originally posted [Chaya's Home Page](#) to celebrate the exploits of her kitten. A digital artist by avocation, Jurist added several photomontages after Chaya was felled by feline infectious peritonitis. "I wanted her picture to be up there for all the world to see," Jurist explained.

Chaya's page first went up before Jurist even created her own home page. Since "not everyone knows about Photoshop and HTML," Jurist said, she sees a need for professionally maintained Web memorials, like the [Virtual Pet Cemetery](#).

No less than deification is the goal for at least one feline Web page. This

cat cult site, devoted to [The Lord Banchee \(Ruler of the Universe\)](#) declares for its orange calico sovereign: "I am the ruler of this Universe. The Slaves in my Household have small minds that make the job of controlling them easier."

Even this cynical old reporter can attest to the mind-control phenomenon. While writing this article, I was accorded more attention from a tuxedo cat named Willow

than in all the previous five years of our acquaintance. Willow, who usually feigns disinterest when I'm at the computer, couldn't seem to stay away. I know she didn't actually *make* me post my first Web page ever (with the help of Netscape Navigator Gold and online instructions from my service provider, Interport), but she must have played off my guilt. After nearly two years of obfuscation on my part, [Willow The Cat's Little Page of High-Tech Wisdom](#) has just launched her as a catizen of cyberspace.)

