

# SO IT GOES

BY JASON LOVE

**"Free kitten. Cute, cuddly, irresistible."**

That's how the ad read. What I didn't know is that 'free kitten' is one of those oxymoron things like 'working vacation' or 'Microsoft Works.'

During that first trip to the pet shop, I discovered that my free cat would require, among other things: box, litter, scooper, liner, cover, filters, and designated dust-vac; wet food, dry food, nibble treats, bowls, and specially formulated kitten milk; no-scratch spray for the couch and do-scratch spray for the scratch post; scratch post; collar; I.D. tag; chew toys; flea comb; shampoo; cat bed; spray bottle; lint roller; jungle gym; immunity shots; and if you know what's good for you, pet insurance.

It doesn't help that cats are anti-establishment. You buy tuna; they want chicken. Open a door; they use the window. I bought for our kitten, Homer, a £20 teaser wand and he spent the night playing with its wrapper. So it goes.

I can already hear my grandpa nagging: "All this money on cat toys. When I was young, we just tied strings to dead mice..."

Add to the receipt a handful of new books, not to read but to throw at Homer when he starts doing wheelies at three in the morning. Cats are "nocturnal," which comes from Old French *noc*, meaning 'at night', and *turnal*, meaning 'drives your master to drink'.

Homer is exploring our house like The Tasmanian Devil, leaving holes to mark his path. He has taken out flower vases, photo albums, important-looking documents, and one arch-rival teddy bear... gutted.

That's why Nature made kittens so adorable - so we don't murder them when they swing from the curtains like James Bond.

Homer assaults anything that twitches, blinks, or God help you, makes a scratching noise. He doesn't understand motion that isn't directly related to the game of Hunt and Chase. To this day he thinks I make the bed for his personal amusement. It was a dark day when Homer realised that all the time he spent sleeping on the cabinet we weren't

worshipping him at all: We were simply watching TV.

Experts say that our kitten is "exploring his boundaries", but I believe he's possessed by Satan (one more cost: exorcism).

I used to be a light-hearted bloke with chirpy words for everyone. Now I start the day saying "No!" and chase my orange sun around the house with a spray bottle. "Stop it, stop it, stop it!" Some people think it's cruel to spray your cat like this, but I use bottled water.

In fact, I think we should adopt this technology for humans. If someone, for instance, can't stop clearing his throat over the course of a six-hour plane ride, you just squirt him in the forehead. Sure, he'll be annoyed, but he'll learn.

Almost forgot anti-bacterial ointment. Homer weighs only three pounds, but ninety percent of that weight is teeth and claws. If you feed kittens after midnight, they will, like Gremlins, turn into crazed monsters and gain enough centrifugal force to leave skid marks on your headboard. Homer races back and forth like fifteen animals suffering from OCD (overactive cat disorder). I'm sure the pet shop sells the medication.

But eventually the little man peters out and curls into a lump between your legs; and as he snores there like a mini whoopee cushion, your heart turns to butter and, just as Nature intended, you forgive. Worse, you come to see the wisdom in low-fat, vitamin-enriched, plaque-control kitten nibbles.

Despite his wake of destruction, I find myself asking, "How can I improve this cat's life?" Now that Homer has finished discovering The Inside, he gazes sadly out the window wondering what the rest of the world tastes like.

Maybe he just needs a playmate. Would you know that I just saw an ad for free kittens...

