

Tabby's Place®

A CAT SANCTUARY



New Beginnings: FeLV+ Cats

Jonathan Rosenberg, Founder & Executive Director

Our newsletters usually open with “New Beginnings”, introducing a cat your generosity helped save. We have written about cats with tragic histories, difficult diseases, or severe behavioral problems that left them with nowhere else to turn.

It has been gratifying to work with you to give these cats not only a life, but a future filled with love.

But, over the years, we have been unable to help cats from the most hopeless situation: infection with the feline leukemia virus, FeLV.

This limitation has been heartbreaking, but not surprising. FeLV is a confusing condition that is challenging to manage. The more we study the disease, the less we seem to understand:

- Some cats succumb to the disease in months, while others live a normal lifespan.
- The virus can be transmitted via casual contact, which means proper housing is crucial.
- Some cats can eliminate the

virus after infection, while others become persistently infected.

Yet others remain in limbo: not infected, but not “uninfected.”

Caring properly for FeLV+ cats requires flexible space, easily reconfigurable to accommodate changing situations. This has made it infeasible for us to save these exceptionally needy cats, a source of heartache at the sanctuary for cats from “hopeless situations.”

But that is about to be ancient history.

Thanks to one extraordinary gift, we are beginning a significant expansion that will provide the quantity and type of space required for these most desperate cats: Quinn’s Corner.

I welcome you to this special issue devoted to FeLV. You’ll learn about the condition itself, discover how Tabby’s Place will care for our new residents, and meet some of the remarkable FeLV+ cats who inspire us¹.



Quinn, the cat who inspired it all

For 17 years, helping FeLV+ cats was just a dream. Now, it’s about to come true. I hope you’ll join me in welcoming the cats who need us most.

¹Tabby’s Place has cared for a small number of FeLV+ cats through the years, but, as you’ll read, these have been isolated cases requiring foster homes, as we were not equipped to house them on site.

FeLV Profile: Marjory

“Once a Tabby’s Place cat, always a Tabby’s Place cat.”

For Marjory, that promise made the difference between life and death.

We’re always saddened when adopters return a cat to Tabby’s Place. Marjory’s family simply felt they “didn’t have time” for her after 4 years. We may not understand their reasons, but we’re grateful they brought Marjory back to us.

When she returned to Tabby’s Place, Marjory was sad and

sickly, with painfully abscessed skin. A biopsy revealed ulcerative dermatitis. Marjory responded well to steroid therapy, and slowly began responding to our affection. The rejected tortoiseshell was letting herself love and be loved again.

We regularly test each new (or returned) cat for both FIV and FeLV. Marjory’s second test was a dagger in all of our hearts: our gentle girl was FeLV+. It was a mystery how she could have contracted the virus, as her adopters claimed she hadn’t



Marjory

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been exposed to other cats.

But, now that we knew, we'd need to create a private suite for her, both to protect her fragile immune system and to prevent the spread of FeLV to other cats. Marjory settled



Marjory loves to play and has endless energy

into the sunny “bachelor pad” vacated by the late Max; it was the only “one-cat” room at Tabby’s Place.

Before we could breathe a sigh of relief that Marjory was in a stable haven, crisis struck again. Marjory suffered a seizure, which left her struggling to stand. Blood tests and an MRI revealed nothing amiss, and a neurologist could find no explanation for Marjory’s episode. Gradually, she began to improve, walking – albeit in a clumsy way – eating, and generally loving life.

Marjory’s sunny room became a favorite hangout of staff and volunteers, and the delighted tortie found herself seldom alone. She gushed with gratitude, spending most of her day purring, playing, and rubbing her many lovers’ legs with all her might.

As of this writing, Marjory’s



As of this writing, Marjory’s FeLV status is uncertain

story has gotten even sweeter – albeit, again, in a mysterious way. Like Quinn, who you’ll meet later in this newsletter, Marjory now tests negative for FeLV. This good news is still inconclusive, as we haven’t been able to determine whether the virus may still be hiding in Marjory’s bone marrow. But, whatever the future holds, Marjory will be held by a love that will not let her go, and a promise that saved her life. - A.H.

Caring For An FeLV+ Cat At Home

Like all Tabby’s Place kitties, our FeLV+ cats will be adoptable (with rare exceptions). Do you think your heart and home might have room for one of these extraordinary cats? Loving an FeLV+ cat just might be one of the greatest joys of your life. Consider the following:

- Cats with FeLV can remain healthy for months or years. Some, like Diana (who you’ll meet later in this newsletter), can live long lives, especially if they are infected as adults.
- When adopting an FeLV+ cat, you should hope for the best but prepare your heart for the worst. Some cats may experience transient viral infections, fighting off the virus and developing immunity. Some cats will become persistently infected, with the virus

moving into the bone marrow and suppressing the cat’s immune system. Such cats may be asymptomatic for years, but most will develop related diseases within 2-3 years. 85% of persistently infected cats die within 3 years of diagnosis.

- FeLV+ cats can live with any non-cat species, but should only live with other FeLV+ cats. The disease spreads through casual interaction, such as grooming and sharing food bowls, so the risk of transmission between cats is high.
- Since FeLV suppresses a cat’s immune system, infected cats are more susceptible to illnesses. It’s essential to treat any secondary infections promptly.
- Make sure your vet is supportive.

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Quinn demonstrates the quality of life FeLV+ cats can enjoy



Quinn encourages you to warm up to the idea of adopting an FeLV+ cat

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Many veterinarians are fully sympathetic and will be of great help in caring for your new family member. But, some doctors have the misconception that FeLV+ cats live sad, short lives, and may be reluctant to take them as patients.

- FeLV+ cats must stay indoors, to protect both their own immune systems and the health of other cats.
- Like all kitties, FeLV+ cats should eat a balanced diet, with no raw meat, eggs, or non-pasteurized

dairy, which could harbor bacteria and parasites.

- When feeding your FeLV+ cat, remove all uneaten wet food within 30 minutes, to prevent the growth of bacteria.
- To protect your cat's immune system, keep her environment exceptionally clean and stress-free.
- Celebrate your cat's life. Most FeLV+ cats are not "sickly," and they rarely contract chronic illnesses requiring long-term medical treatment. Their final illness is usually swift, sparing them extended suffering. For

most of their lives, however long or short, these marvelous cats enjoy good health and abundant happiness.

RECOMMENDED READING:

- Alley Cat Allies, [Feline Leukemia Virus \(FeLV\)](#)
- Nomi Berger, [Adopting Cats with Feline Leukemia](#)
- Cornell Feline Health Center, [Feline Leukemia Virus](#)
- Rania Gollakner, BS DVM, and Ernest Ward, DVM, [Feline Leukemia Virus Disease Complex](#)
- Aimee Larsen, [Feline leukemia misconceptions](#)

FeLV vs. FIV

Angela Hartley, Development Director

It's common to confuse feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukemia virus (FeLV). In addition to having similar acronyms, both diseases are retroviruses, and both suppress a cat's immune

system. Each is present in about 2-3% of cats in the U.S., and both are incurable. But as you'll see, FeLV is more difficult to manage. Tabby's Place has taken in FIV+ cats since we first opened...and now, thanks to Quinn's Corner, we'll be able to embrace FeLV+ cats at last.

Disease Acronym	FIV	FeLV
Full name	Feline immunodeficiency virus	Feline leukemia virus
Disease progression	Generally does not cause severe illness; many cats are asymptomatic	Can cause multiple fatal (and non-fatal) disease syndromes, including certain types of cancers
Transmission	Via bloodstream, typically from deep bite wounds; a "fighting disease"	Via secretions including saliva, nasal secretions, urine, feces, and milk; may be transmitted through grooming, from mother to kittens, sharing food bowls; a "friendly disease"
Life expectancy	Same as uninfected cats	Variable, but persistent infection is likely to result in a shorter life span
Risk of transmission to other cats	Can typically live with uninfected cats <u>safely</u>	Should only live with other FeLV+ cats
Risk factors	Most common among unneutered, outdoor male cats	Equally common among male and female, altered and unaltered cats
Is infection permanent?	Yes	Not always
Symptoms	Low white blood cell count, inflammation of the gums and mouth, chronic infections (upper respiratory, urinary, skin, etc.)	Anemia, intestinal disease, cancers such as lymphoma and leukemia, chronic infections, dental disease
Diagnosis	Straightforward in cats over 6 months of age, due to reliable testing	Complicated to diagnose; testing may involve blood marrow



Knickers has FIV, not FeLV



Bunk had both FIV and FeLV

RECOMMENDED READING:

- Dr. Karen Becker, [FIV and FeLV... What's the Difference?](#)
- Cornell Feline Health Center, [Testing for FIV and FeLV](#)
- Vetstreet, [Feline Leukemia Virus and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus Testing](#)
- Jessica Vogelsang, DVM, [The Difference Between FeLV and FIV](#)

FeLV Profile: Diana

Julie Pasini, Volunteer

When I started volunteering at Tabby's Place, I was one of few volunteers with a spare room and no other occupants of the furred kind. This turned out to be a blessing for Tabby's Place, for me, and for some very special cats.

When a gentle cat named Bunk tested positive for FeLV, the sanctuary needed a comfortable place where he could live out his days with companionship. I offered to foster Bunk, knowing he would have his own private suite, as well as willing hands and a lap nearby to cuddle him.

Bunk's illness progressed quickly, and we let him go three weeks after he had come home with me. Bunk was in good spirits and continually affectionate right up to the end.

I am currently fostering my second FeLV+ house mate, Diana. While Bunk was in a state of hospice care with me, Diana has the vitality of a dozen "normal" cats. The polarity of their situations has continued to astound me, but mostly it brings me hope.

When I brought Diana home, she cowered in a cat tree for two months before I could even glimpse anything but a mottled torbie blob. Based on my experience with Bunk, I assumed she, too would fade, succumbing quickly to FeLV. Thankfully, that was not the path Diana's illness took.

Diana's spirit didn't fade, either. Slowly, Diana started making appearances in the rest of the house. Soon she sought me out for head-boops and catnip toys.

Today, two years into her



Diana is thriving, years after her FeLV diagnosis

foster stay, and completely free of any symptoms, Diana is thriving. Occasionally, coworkers will ask me how the "sick cat" is doing. I look at

them confused. "Sick cat?" Diana is quite the opposite of a "sick cat." "Sick" perhaps in how much she loves worn socks that don't make it into the laundry hamper.

But Diana shows no signs of her FeLV+ status, and I hope she gets to enjoy the pleasures of our cozy life for many more days.



Happy Diana at home



Beautiful Diana

What is FeLV?

Dr. Laura Collins, Veterinarian

Feline leukemia virus (FeLV) is a retrovirus, first discovered in 1964 in a cluster of cats that all developed lymphoma, which we now know is one of the sequelae (effects) of the virus. At that time, the prevalence of the virus was as high as 40%¹, but since then, due to multifactorial efforts to control the spread of the virus, the prevalence has dropped and plateaued at 2 to 3% in the United

States².

Research into the virus is ongoing, and each year we learn valuable information that can help us to improve and lengthen FeLV+ cats' lives.

Feline leukemia is shed in many body fluids, including saliva, feces, milk and urine. It is transmitted by sustained close contact with other cats, including mutual grooming; sharing of food, water and litterbox-es; maternal transmission to kittens;

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Mr. Frosty also tested positive for FeLV only briefly

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and fighting.

Transmission can result in an *abortive infection*, where the cat eliminates the virus entirely, or several other levels of infection, including harboring the virus asymptotically, or developing a fatal sequela.

Making the diagnosis of feline leukemia can be more challenging than you might think. We use a test, called an ELISA assay, which tests for the presence of the virus in the bloodstream. If the ELISA is positive, we know the virus is present, but we do not know whether that cat will be permanently infected or be one of the lucky ones to eliminate the virus from her system. So, we run a second test, called an IFA, or more recently, a newer test called a PCR.

If the IFA or PCR is positive, we know the cat is permanently infected. If the IFA or PCR is negative, we retest the cat in a month, by which time he will theoretically have either eliminated the virus or now be IFA or PCR positive, demonstrating a permanent infection.

However, a few “discordant” cats will remain ELISA positive and IFA or PCR negative. These cats may



Olaf was transiently infected with FeLV, ultimately testing negative

have sequestered (hidden) virus that is not circulating intact virus or shedding virus-infected cells from the bone marrow. Over time, about 25% of such cats will eventually become negative on both tests, 25% will become positive on both tests, and the remainder will remain in limbo -- discordant land. Because these cats may be shedding virus, they should be housed away from FeLV negative cats, but because they may not truly be infected, they should not be housed with FeLV positive cats. That's a dilemma for a cat sanctuary like Tabby's Place. Quinn's Corner will provide special housing for discordant cats, away from FeLV positive and negative cats³.

There are no current studies describing the expected survival times of FeLV+ cats, but early studies done in multi-cat households showed an average survival of 3 years after diagnosis⁴. Based on more recent experience of cats living in smaller, more stable home environments, the impression is that many of these cats can live much longer, sometimes even a normal lifespan.

FeLV is most commonly recognized for its ability to cause lymphoma or leukemia, but because it is immune-suppressive it can predispose cats to a variety of other bacterial, viral or parasitic diseases. When we diagnose a sick cat with FeLV, we cannot cure the FeLV, but we can address many of these co-infections successfully.

Because FeLV is so easily transmitted in multi-cat situations, it requires the ability to house these cats separately from non-infected cats.

In Quinn's Corner, these cats will be maintained in safe, healthy and comfortable new suites, without risk to non-infected cats. We will provide the high quality medical care many



“India, Kolsch and Lager have remained persistently FeLV+, but are all now thriving in forever homes

of these cats will need to live their lives to the fullest. We plan to partner with researchers, offering to enroll our FeLV+ cats in studies designed to elucidate new treatments that will help not just our cats, but cats throughout the world.

We look forward to being able to help FeLV+ cats and watching them enjoy life at Tabby's Place.

¹Rogerson P, Jarrett W, Mackey L. Epidemiological studies on feline leukaemia virus infection. I. A serological survey in urban cats. *Int J Cancer*. 1975 May 15;15(5):781-785.

²Lee IT, Levy JK, Gorman SP, Crawford PC, Slater MR. Prevalence of feline leukemia virus infection and serum antibodies against feline immunodeficiency virus in unowned free-roaming cats. *J Am Vet Med Assoc*. 2002 Mar 1;220(5):620-622.

³All of this reflects the present understanding of FeLV infection, and, accordingly, our current plans for how best to care for our FeLV+ cats in Quinn's Corner. But, as the science progresses, our specific plans (for housing, separation of discordant cats, etc.) are subject to change.

⁴Feline Leukemia Virus Infection: New Diagnostic Perspectives, Fifth International Society for Companion Animal Infectious Diseases Symposium: 2018, Melissa Beall, DVM, PhD; Julie Levy, DVM, PhD, DACVIM, DABVP.



FeLV Profile: Quinn

In some ways, Quinn's is the quintessential "Tabby's Place story." But when the tale is told, it's clear: Quinn is one of a kind.

Quinn was only a baby when a good Samaritan found her face-down in the snow. The kitten appeared dead, but her determined rescuer was unwilling to give up even a sliver of hope. This brave woman would be the first of Quinn's angels.

Tabby's Place was honored to be the next stop on Quinn's journey. We rejoiced to see the sweet, sassy kitten gain weight and thrive. But devastating news was hiding in Quinn's blood. Routine testing showed that the tiny tuxedo cat had the one disease Tabby's Place was unequipped to handle: FeLV.

Like her first angel, we were



Quinn thrives on four plus years after diagnosis

unwilling to give up on Quinn. We scrambled to accommodate her, creating a private suite where she would be comfortable, happy, and visited by a stream of doting staff and volunteers. It was a good life, but we ached for more for Quinn. Despite her dire diagnosis, we were unable to give up hope.

Hope came in the form of Quinn's ultimate angel, an adopter with her heart set on "the neediest cat." No stranger to heartache, the adopter was seeking her next hospice pet. With an extraordinary gift for nurturing ailing animals through their final journeys, she was immediately, irrevocably smitten with Quinn. To our astonished glee, Quinn had a forever home.

Quinn's adoption was the greatest day of her life. But there would soon be a close second. On a routine vet visit, tests showed Quinn to be negative for FeLV. In baffled joy, we held our breaths, knowing this could be temporary. But over months – and then years – Quinn continued to show no signs of the disease. Her veterinarians, including specialists at a world-class facility, were astounded.

It seemed there was nothing the mighty Quinn couldn't do. The word "impossible" was simply not in her vocabulary.



Quinn

It's only fitting that Quinn is the reason Tabby's Place's own impossible dream is coming true. Inspired by her girl – and led by her own one-of-a-kind heart of gold – Quinn's Mom has made it possible for Tabby's Place to create Quinn's Corner.

Angels have accompanied Quinn her whole life. And now, she's inspiring a heavenly haven where no FeLV+ cat will go unloved. It's a phenomenal privilege to build Quinn's Corner in her honor. – A.H.

The Wonder of Quinn's Corner

Tabby's Place is looking forward to providing a haven for FeLV+ cats. These beautiful kitties are the last group of cats with nowhere to turn, and it's a dream come true to welcome them to Tabby's Place at last.

But Quinn's Corner will be much more than just a safe place to stay. Like all cats, FeLV+ kitties deserve the very best. Quinn's Corner will be a world class, one-of-a-kind haven

specifically designed to help FeLV+ cats thrive. It will include:

- A bright, open Lobby, where friendly FeLV+ cats will snuggle with visitors and volunteers, enjoying the same social life as "normal" kitties
- Sunny solariums, where FeLV+ cats can enjoy fresh air, sunshine, chirping birds and safe access to the outdoors

- A large suite for persistently infected cats, outfitted with abundant vertical space, climbing ramps and cozy cubbies
- One-of-a-kind small suites, uniquely created for cats with discordant FeLV+ test results, who cannot live with persistently infected cats or FeLV- kitties. Given their "limbo" status, these

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cats have the greatest difficulty finding sanctuaries; Quinn's Corner is designed with their needs top-of-mind.

- Cheerful office spaces, where discordant FeLV+ cats will share their days and their love with Tabby's Place staff members. Quinn's Corner is being

designed around the health and joy of the neediest cats of all. At last, FeLV+ cats will find their own slice of heaven here at Tabby's Place. – A.H.



Your Turn To Help FeLV+ Cats

Quinn's adopter has provided generous funding to cover most of the costs of construction for Quinn's Corner, as well as initial operating funds.

But the cats need you. This is Tabby's Place's first expansion,

and it's a massive labor of love. Caring for cats with FeLV is a costly, delicate endeavor. We can't make this dream dance into reality without your help.

There's never been a more important time to give your best

to the cats. Please join us on this extraordinary journey. Cats like Marjory, Diana and Quinn need all the love we have to give. Your donation will help to save lives – and to change the world for the cats who need you most. - A.H.

Naming Opportunities

Are you in a position to make a sizable donation that will help FeLV+ cats for many years to come? In thanks for your loving gift of \$10,000 or more, you can have your name – or your cat's name, or the wording of your choice – engraved somewhere special at Tabby's Place. Leave a lasting testament to your love for needy cats:

\$1,000,000	Main Lobby (1)	\$25,000	Exam Room (1)
\$250,000	Kitten Nursery (1)	\$25,000	Small Offices / Small Suites (4)
\$100,000	Dedication Garden (1)	\$20,000	Holding Room (3)
\$100,000	Operations Center (1)	\$20,000	Large Solarium (7)
\$100,000	Staff & Volunteer Lounge (1)	\$10,000	Small Solarium (5)
\$50,000	Large Suite (6)	\$10,000	Suite Cubby (20+)
\$30,000	Small Suite (6)	\$10,000	Indoor Bench (2+)
\$30,000	Executive Director Office & Solarium (1)	\$10,000	Outdoor Bench (2+)

For more information, please contact Angela Hartley, Development Director at (908) 237-5300 x235 or ah@tabbysplace.org