

In defense of cats... the purr-fect tenant

By Chantal Saxe

Finding an apartment in Halifax that is within walking distance of Dalhousie can be trying under any circumstances. Finding an apartment in Halifax that is within walking distance of Dal when you own three cats is downright impossible.

Recently, I found an apartment that was ideal. It was even ideal for the cats.

The wife liked me.

The husband didn't like cats.

I didn't get the apartment.

This was one of the better situations. Usually I don't even get in the door.

"Hello, I'm calling about your one bedroom apartment."

"Oh yes, what can I tell you about it?"

"Well, is there parking?"

"Yes..."

"How about laundry?" (At this point the landlord, sensing your interest, begins to sell the place. They mention the hardwood floors, the backyard, and the working dishwasher. The familiar balloon of hope wells up inside you despite the fact that you have yet to pop the big question. Your heart pounds. This place sounds perfect. You take a deep breath; you can't delay it any longer...)

"How..." you ask, your casual tone masking your trepidation, "do you feel about cats?"

"Cats?" they respond as if you have just asked if you could move in with your oversized python. "I don't like cats." Still, in an effort to be nicethey ask, "How many you got?"

(Suddenly you feel as if you own an obscene number of cats. Maybe you should lie... Maybe you can hide two of them in a laundry basket when you move in... Your palms are sweaty... They're waiting for an answer...)

"Three."

"THREE!!!" (At this point something snaps in their little landlord minds. They have horrifying visions of three huge ravaging creatures at large in their newly renovated apartment, shedding wads of flea-infested fur with each step. They envision their new carpets clawed to shreds, their walls festering with spray, and their backyard garden turned into a massive litter pit.)

"No..." they say breathlessly, "I don't allow cats here."

CLICK.

One landlord informed he'd had bad experiences with cats.

"You've had bad experiences with tenants" I replied "But you still rent to people."

"People pay rent" he snarled.

After an entire week of full-time apartment hunting, I have come to a conclusion. Landlords simply don't understand that cats who are neutered and litter-trained are relatively harmless creatures. Sure, they might dig up a couple of flowers or put a scratch in the screen door, but have these landlords forgotten what people are capable of doing?

Human tenants set fires and start floods. They break windows, leave the door unlocked, and paint all the walls black. They burn cigarette holes in the couch, spill beer on the

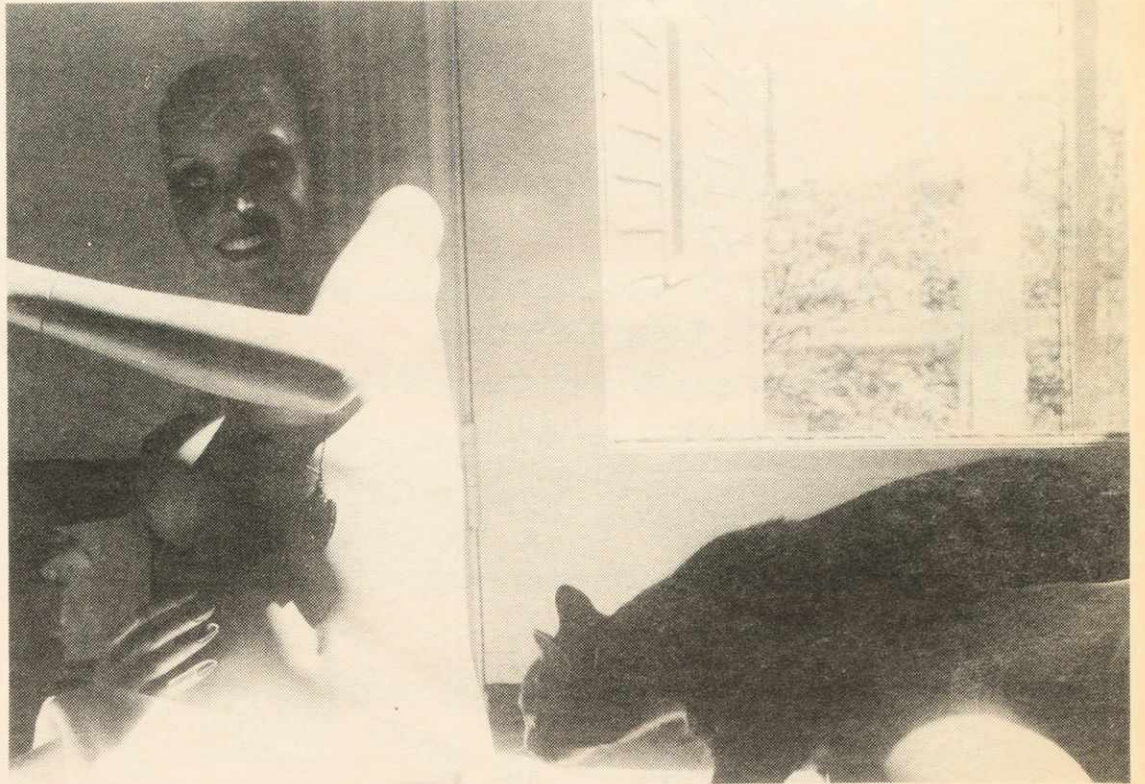


Photo: Rochelle Owen

rug, and invite seventeen of their cousins to move in with them.

When tenants move out a remarkable metamorphosis occurs within landlord's minds. Beer stains on the rug become cat pee, cigarette holes in the upholstery are claw marks, and the garbage left in the kitchen is mistaken for pounds of putrid kitty litter. "Blaming the cat" is a defensive reaction on the part of landlords. If they accept that people, not cats, are the real culprits, they will be too depressed to stay in the business.

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