

## Lessons from a kitten

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I have two cats, Cleo and Mia, who are about 5-1/2 and 2 years old now. Both are rescued cats, and domestic short-haired "breeds."

Nearly two years ago I got a second feline to keep Cleo company while I worked long nursing shifts. Mia was just weaned at eight weeks old, and so small that I could hold her body in the palm of a hand and have her legs immediately on both sides of the hand.

Mia was a sharp contrast from her sister Cleo, because Cleo was living on the streets of Philadelphia for 4-5 months of her early life. I adopted Cleo two years earlier at age 10 months after she was being fostered in the stairwell of her foster mom's home. Apparently, she didn't get along well with other kitties, so she was kept alone in the stairwell. As a result, she was skittish and had very limited tolerance for being held or petted.

Mia was born in a small room, her mom rescued from the South (Alabama?) while pregnant. Her early weeks were confined to that room with her mom and siblings, but she was well cared for and quite protected compared to her sister.

Okay enough context.

Mia comes to me and climbs her front paws on my chest and kneads my tummy while I pet her. If I am only petting her with one hand, she nudges my other hand to join the party. She keeps kneading until she's ready to stop. She is teaching me to be greedy for affection and pleasure.

Mia purrs while kneading me, but so quietly that I can usually only tell because I feel her body vibrating a little. Mia is teaching me to express joy in my own way.

Mia investigates her world without fear. She will climb into a dresser drawer and hop behind the drawer to see what is back there. Mia is teaching me the joy of curiosity.

Cleo has almost always let Mia eat first when I give them a dish of wet food (tuna). Mia eats her fill before walking away and letting Cleo eat. Mia is teaching me it's okay to take care of your needs.

Awfully smart for a kitten!