



# Leaps and bonds

A rescuer for 28 years, Donna is the best friend of felines – and dogs, too

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Annabelle the cockatoo helps Donna gather some of her cats for an afternoon snack in her backyard.

“Come on, come on!” the little white bird squawks from an open perch on the patio as more than a dozen curious and hungry felines rally from their resting areas for treats in a silver platter.

The commotion also attracts a couple of small dogs, who Donna redirects away – they'll all later get a slice of a turkey that's roasting in the oven.

Everyone gets their share, love and respect at the Save Animals through Rescue and Adoption (SARA) Society shelter – be they any of the resident 190 cats, six dogs or nine birds (two of them chickens).

Each resident has a name and a story, with most of them having been surrendered, abandoned, homeless, abused or otherwise neglected before being rescued by SARA.

A typical example is an orange-and-white tabby named Boe, a cat who arrived at SARA with his sister from the home of a senior and had never been properly socialized.

Boe went into a deep depression for weeks before recovering. His sister didn't survive.

Today, Boe can be found resting comfortably on Donna's bed.

Einstein, in rough physical shape but good spirits, was rescued from a semi-feral feeding colony that was picked off by coyotes.

"He's been here for a couple of months and he's really good," says Donna. "Before, you couldn't get near this guy. He hated everybody."

Visitors at the front door are treated to both barks and purrs, and a surprising lack of odour and a spit-and-polish cleanliness.

"I shelter them in my home," says Donna, SARA's founder and an animal rescuer for 28 years – the last 18 years living in the same house in North Surrey.

Like classic Star Trek tribbles, the cats are everywhere, but they're never in the way. (Donna says it's only risky walking in the dark.)

The leather couch in the living room has several occupants, both cats and dogs. On rainier days, she says, the couch is at capacity.

Seven cats rest on Donna's bedroom comforter, while others lay on the floor. Another dozen hang around the kitchen window sill, table and chairs.

There's a room opposite the back deck with a bank of cat beds on the wall, about half of them occupied. Without irony, it's called the cat room.

Donna makes annual upgrades to her house, and has renovated and expanded isolation areas for incoming or sick cats, or new mothers and their kittens. The kitchen also has new wall tiles to help with cleanliness.

In the escape-proof backyard, behind the chicken coop (they lay one egg each day), is an area of tall grass and bushes for feral cats, who rely on gradual socialization.

There are more than 40 cats back there, who disappear at the approach of a stranger.

The only places off limits are Donna's office and the bathroom, which substitutes as a hospital on occasion.

Taking care of the cats who come in, a process which includes veterinary checks, shots and spaying/neutering is more than a full-time job for Donna, who runs the non-profit society with the help of volunteers.

It's a labour of love, she says. And of course, she knows every animal's name.

SARA has a strict no-kill policy for its cats, which have been abandoned or are feral. Most are brought in by the public or from the SPCA.

Those that cannot be adopted out due to behavioural issues, age or illness – about two-thirds are SARA “lifers” – get the royal treatment at home until they die.

For more information about adoption, volunteering or donating money or pet supplies to the SARA Society, call 604-580-8254 or visit [www.sarasociety.com](http://www.sarasociety.com)