





HOUSE SITTERS BECOME CAT FOSTER PARENTS

by Andrew Redfern

When COVID-19 hit and our travel plans were thrown into chaos we decided to return to our apartment in Sydney and take the opportunity to bring forward planned renovations. Our 2020 house sitting arrangements had all been cancelled. We knew we wouldn't be travelling for a while so dove into our renovations with gusto and completed them within six weeks.

As we started to settle in to our "new normal" we realised we were missing pets, having had pets around us pretty well full time for the past four years as house sitters. But we didn't want to get a pet because we knew we wanted to travel again as soon as we can, and a pet can be a 15-16 year plus commitment.



Becoming cat foster parents

A chance visit from a friend mentioned DCH Animal Rescue who are a rescue agency who often require foster parents for dogs, cats and horses. Knowing our apartment wouldn't accommodate a dog or horse, we contacted them and offered our services as foster parents for a cat.

Our house sitting references supported our case and we were told about a recent rescue. Mavis, a young tabby cat, had just been rescued from the streets along with her kittens. We agreed to foster her and waited for a few weeks until her vaccinations, microchipping and desexing were all complete.

Supplies and kitty litter

Having being nomadic for the last four years and not having previously had a pet in our apartment, we turned to Facebook marketplace and other online second hand shopping sites to acquire the necessary pet supplies – litter trays, scratching posts, toys, cat carrier etc. In a similar way to the house sitting community, we found many generous pet owners.

Several of them, when they found out what we were doing even gave us unadvertised supplies such as food and water bowls, grooming supplies and the like. Once again we were blown away by the generosity of strangers.

Kitty litter was another thing we needed. As a house sitter, you just use the litter the home owner provides so we had to investigate the type of litter we wanted Mavis to use. On advice from the adoption agency we discovered crystal litter which is a non-clumping, more absorbant, economical and more environmental option. Up until this point, our favourite kitty litter (from New Zealand) was "pussydo" but we are now converts to "crystal litter" and can provide our experiences to future pet owners if required.



Mavis settles in

The first few days (and nights!) were rather challenging as Mavis was on high alert – either hiding behind the fridge or constantly surveying the house, particularly high windows in search of an escape route. The first "sleepless" night she meowed constantly and the second was a little more settled as I, Andrew slept on the lounge to reassure her.

Initially she was allowed in the bedroom but one of her favourite things to do in the middle of the night was to jump from a high window onto the bed near our heads, awaking us in fright, as she wanted to play. We have thus changed the routine a little and set boundaries which she has coped with extremely well. Our approach with pets during our house sitting has always be to remain calm and let them initially approach us and this has worked very well with Mavis.



Six weeks on and she is well and truly settled and has us wrapped around her little furry paws. She is very independent and loves a cuddle on her terms and timing. She definitely lets us know when she is hungry, meowing loudly.

This can include at 5am in the morning if she hears either of us stir. She cannot control her hunting instincts when the laser pointer comes out and will even lift the floor mats to see if the light has disappeared underneath. She has her favourite spot on the lounge where Christopher "used" to sit and will tap him to move along if he encroaches on her spot.

Adding to our skillset

Fostering a cat has been a wonderful experience and has given us a new skillset and knowledge of animals to add to our house sitting resume. As house sitters, you adopt the routines of the pets you are caring for. As foster parents, you are establishing the routines for a new pet which involves getting to know more about animal, and a particular pet's behaviour.

We adopted some of our previous home owner strategies around feeding routines and even the food we provide.

Our experience with rescue animals through our house sitting has been invaluable, realising that there may be situations that bring back traumatic memories. And even that no two animals are the same and will behave differently. Mavis is not a fan of vacuum cleaners so we make sure we do this in a way that minimises her anxiety. She, having had to fend for herself on the streets is rather food obsessed so we ensure she has plenty of space around her at meal times so she doesn't feel threatened. We often compare her antics with some of the other cats we have cared for.



Getting attached

One of the suggestions in the foster care manual we were provided is to always refer to the cat as someone else's so that we don't get too attached. Whilst this may be too late in the case of Mavis, we are used to having to return pets to their owners and whilst we know it will be hard when the time comes, we will let Mavis go knowing that we were part of giving her a second chance.

The adoption process involves prospective pet parents contacting us and arranging a meeting with us and Mavis. Following our first meeting, we realised our experiences in interviews with home owners as house sitters prepared us well for this situation. Without thinking we asked pertinent questions to get to know the type of pet the adoptee was looking for and whether or not they would be a suitable match for Mavis.

We also noted the types of questions they asked to see if Mavis would be compatible with their situation and lifestyle. One potential adoptee wanted a cuddly cat and while Mavis enjoys pats, she certainly is not a lap cat and so we suggested the applicant look for a more suitable fur companion.

Another had other pets and children in the house which we didn't think suitable for an independent Mavis who likes her own space and limited attention. We trust our gut instinct, both as house sitters and now as foster parents, knowing that the right person will come along for Mavis.

Loving pets

Mavis continues to live with us, awaiting her fur-ever home. We continue to enjoy caring for her and it has been such a privilege to watch her become more settled and less anxious. We can now add foster parents to our house sitting profile to further communicate to home owners our love (and knowledge) of pets. Just as house sitting is a win-win situation, so too is foster parenting.

Mavis has been provided a secure, safe environment whilst we have had the pleasure of pet pats and the responsibility of caring for an animal. Fingers crossed Mavis finds her future home soon, although one suspects she (and definitely us) would be more than happy for this arrangement to continue for some time.

And just like all the pets we have cared for as house sitters, Mavis will always have a special place in our hearts.

author bio

Andrew and Christopher, known as the **Global Wanderers** started their international, full-time house sitting adventures in 2016 and have completed more than 50 sits in that time. They love being part of the house sitting community and meeting other travellers.

You can follow them at their [website](#), [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#)