

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness, Hannah Shaw, and Andrew Marttila

JVN: Hey, curious people. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and welcome back to Getting Curious. How are you doing this week? I know how I'm doing. I'm excited because we are taking a break from the election to learn about cats. I'm so excited because we are welcoming back to the show, Hannah Shaw, otherwise known as the kitten lady and her gorgeous husband Andrew Marttila, who is an incredible photographer all about their new book, Cats of the World. They went to 30 countries to interview uh cat rescuers and photograph cats and learn about how different communities and different cultures take care of their cats. And when I heard about their book, I knew that I had to interview them. I want to know all about how people are taking care of cats all over the world. You guys know, I have five cats. I love cats. They have changed my life so much and I think, you know, there's strong feelings around how we need to take care of our community cats. Um, there's an ongoing story out of North Haven, Connecticut about community cats because of local legislation that allows for the uni the euthanization of community cats um, animal welfare is a huge issue in this country. And I think that cats especially, there's a lot that goes on with cats that we don't know. And Hannah is an expert on this. The work that Hannah and Andrew do is so important because they are telling stories. Their organization, Orphan Kitten Club has raised millions of dollars and grant money is helping to fund studies for cat welfare. So they are just so important. And really what I'm curious about here is not only their book, but how can we take better care of cats? So that's really what we're asking today, how can we take better care of cats? But before we do that, let's hear a little bio, Hannah Shaw, also known as Kitten Lady is an award winning kitten rescuer, humane, educator and unwavering animal advocate who has dedicated her life to innovating kitten care and protecting the most vulnerable felines. She, the New York Times best selling author of Tiny But Mighty Kitten Ladies, Big Book of Little Kittens Kitten Ladies Captivity Book and the Adventures and Foster Land Series. She is also the founder of Orphan Kitten Club. A 501c3 nonprofit organization Saving the lives of neonatal kittens throughout the nation. She lives in California with her husband Andrew Marttila, their cats and an endless rotation of foster kittens. Andrew Marttila is a professional animal photographer specializing in cats. Over the years. He's taken millions of photos of our feline overlords, which has been used in worldwide media and both digital and print from the cover of National Geographic, hello, to Good Morning America. He is the creator of several books including shop cats of New York Cats on cats, which is so cute. I can't stand it and how to take awesome photos of cats. He is also a board member of Orphan Kitten Club and has hand raised hundreds of rescue kittens along with his wife, Hannah Shaw. Today we're asking how do different communities take care of their cats? And stick around to the end of the episode where we're going to reflect on what we learned and what I'm curious about now. Welcome back to the show, Hannah and Andrew. I'm so excited you're here. How are you guys doing?

HANNAH SHAW: Uh, we're doing great. Thank you so much for having us.

ANDREW MARTTILA: Good.

JVN: I mean, I am so excited, Hannah, I was just saying before we started, I think that we, I think that we, when did, well, when did I fall in love with you on Instagram? Was it 2018 or 2019? I can't remember when I discovered you and but I mean, I've been in love with you for at least half a decade. Like Instagram love for half a decade. We've gotten to hang out in

real life like thrice we've held kittens together, which is what we did last time. I'm now a cat parent of five whole cats. Do you I think you do know what happened to me since we saw each other last um, Hannah and Andrew. I don't know if Hannah told you this story, but I do think I remember calling you in a, in a 2021 crisis. The great ringworm exposure of 2021 the great ringworm exposure of – you guys, I've never talked about it. I've never, I've –

HANNAH SHAW: Oh yeah, never, you work with cats long enough and you're gonna, you're gonna experience some kind of freaky stuff like that. I'm just so sorry that that had to happen to you.

JVN: People know that I love the Olympics. I'm a big fan of the Olympics. I never expected to have the red Olympic circle on my neck, just a full, like a perfect red Olympic circle. And then the people were like, these people I talked to were like, oh yeah, it's really hard to like give it to your cat. It's like more easy for you to get it from your cat. So don't worry about it. And then I proceeded to, I was Typhoid Mary and I gave it to, I got it from a rescue place. Then I gave it to four of my cats and then we had to give our cats sulfur chloride dips twice a week. It took me like two hours. It was during my filming, Getting Curious like for Netflix, it was like 2020 2021 took us four months –

HANNAH SHAW: I am so sorry that you went through that Jonathan. Um, yeah, I mean, ringworm is a reality in animal welfare and, like, the really sad thing about ringworm is it is treatable. It's like getting, you know, athletes foot or something. But so many cats and kittens are euthanized because it's so contagious that they can't, if they're in a shelter, they can't usually stay there if they have ringworm. So, um, you know, it is a big goal for us, like in the advocacy work that I'm doing uh to make it easier for people to deal with ringworm. Uh I wanted to share, we have a nonprofit organization called Orphan Kitten Club and we do like –

JVN: I love Orphan Kitten Club!

HANNAH SHAW: A ton of or club and you can join the club. That's actually we're funded through club members and we do a ton of national initiatives. But one of them that I think you'll be excited about is we have a ringworm study going on right now and we're looking at like safe and effective alternate treatments to what you had to go through so that more cats and kittens can be saved.

JVN: What are you guys hearing about people on the ground and like in these hurricane ravaged spaces that just survived Helene and now Milton's coming like, are, are you hearing people, is there, is there any like people that we can donate to or that we can help out?

HANNAH SHAW: Yes.

JVN: Like, how can we help people that have animals in these hurricane impacted places?

HANNAH SHAW: Yeah, it's so horrible. And I think that, like, you know, there is nothing that affects humans that doesn't also affect the animals in that population. Right. And, um, I think that I just wanna say definitely, if people are looking for somewhere to donate, there are so many animal shelters impacted by these hurricanes and one in particular, uh, that is a partner organization of our nonprofit, we fund their kitten program and they lost their entire shelter uh due due to the hurricanes, they're called Brother Wolf. They're in Asheville and they literally have to start from like square one. Like they, they lost their entire facility. So um that is something that Orphan Kitten Club will be helping with, you know, we're going to be

helping um with rebuilding their kitten program and um they're a longtime partner of ours. So I know a lot about the work they do and they do amazing things and it's devastating to see the photos. Um I think that whatever community you feel passionate about, like there is definitely going to be somebody on the ground there doing, doing the work –

JVN: But is it, but would you say like if you're really affected because I mean, I've been like, just really sad watching these stories and I mean, it's like these stories about Tampa where it's like they haven't had a direct impact since like 1921 and it's like this fucking massive hurricane, do you think a good place to start is just looking up, like, just like typing like animal shelter, Tampa and just starting there.

HANNAH SHAW: Yes, yeah. And I think like, you know, that goes back to even when we're doing our travels anywhere that you, like, feel a passion to want to help. There, there is somebody there helping cats. So like just research who's doing work there, get familiarized with the work they do. And definitely, like you said, you know, money is unfortunately power in the world that we live in and um those donations can go a really long way. I know a lot of um farm animal sanctuaries, a lot of cat and dog, animal shelters are completely impacted by the hurricanes. So every dollar helps them.

JVN: If my – tell if I'm wrong, did, didn't you tell me about this book like years ago? Because I feel like you guys were traveling and shooting this book? And I feel like, did I know about this book before? Like the internet? I did, didn't I?

HANNAH SHAW: We've been working on this book for about five years and um you know, we started around the last time that I was talking with you in 2019. Um, unfortunately because it's, it involves so much international travel. The pandemic really put kind of like a two year wrench in those plans. Um, and so that's why it's taken us as long, it would have been a long project anyway, but we're super, super glad that now we've, we're finally able to get this out into the world.

JVN: And I just, I think so, Andrew. I got to get like, we got to introduce the girls to the girls and people, the listeners to who Andrew is because Hannah, we like, I think unless anyone's been living under a rock, they, they know who Hannah Shaw kitten lady is. Honey, you're on my speed dial, Andrew, you're the, you shot this book, you shot this book. You're a, you're a wildlife photographer. We just did an episode on wildlife photography a few weeks ago. That really made me shit my pants like 50 times because I mean, wildlife photographers are going through it even if it's cute little cuddly cats, like y'all are getting shots in weird places. And if there's anything I learned about cats from my ringworm era, they can, they're hard to control. You know, if you want, if you're trying to do a little bath, they might not want a little bath. If you, if you want a little picture, they might not want a little picture. So tell us about you. How did you get into wildlife photography? Cat photography? And also how did you guys come together? Because I don't think I ever got that little cute story. Sorry, that was four and one. But Andrew take it away.

ANDREW MARTTILA: Sure yeah, yeah. So I'm primarily almost exclusively a cat photographer. So I do wildlife photography if I'm in Costa Rica, we went to Africa for this book and I took a lot of photos of lions and elephants and stuff.

JVN: I have a question not to interrupt you so fast.

ANDREW MARTTILA: Yeah go for it.

JVN: But does a cat photographer not count as I was thinking that, like, cats are they, I guess because if you're a domestic cat then you're not a wildlife photographer, but if they're outside, aren't they?

ANDREW MARTTILA: Yeah. Yeah, you could qualify as wildlife photography. But um I think that typically incorporates birds and a lot of different species.

JVN: Why do we have to, I'm non binary. I hate a category like we can, you're just a fucking photographer. Ok? That's it. You're a stunning photographer.

ANDREW MARTTILA: Yeah, thank you. I usually say I'm an animal photographer and then if people inquire further, then I'll say I take photos of cats for a living and that usually raises some eyebrows.

JVN: When you said that I wrote down dream job that is so cool. But you keep telling. So how did you get into it?

ANDREW MARTTILA: Uh I got into it about 13-14 years ago when I adopted my first cat when I, when I got my cat. Um and I just, I was going to school for neuroscience at the time and I wanted a way to document him as he grew up because I got him as a kitten. So I started posting these photos that I was taking online and over time they started to garner a lot of attention because at that time if you remember, phone photos were atrocious, they were really, really bad. And so my photos that were taken with a real camera when I was posting them on Instagram, they just stood out. Um, and then from there after school, I said, I'm gonna, I'm gonna try to make it work. I'm gonna, I was living in Philly at the time and I said, if I can, if I can make this work for a year and not go broke or homeless, then, you know, we're gold and I'm not going to go for secondary education and it's been 10 years now and I'm not broke or homeless right now.

JVN: Yes!

ANDREW MARTTILA: So um yeah, I did my first book about 9, 10 years ago and then it's been a steady progression ever since then.

JVN: I mean, you guys are married, which is just like the cute, I mean married work together, shooting this book together, rescuing just like I, I feel like such a millennial when I say hella like I never felt shame around that but in the last year or two –

ANDREW MARTTILA: Really?

JVN: I started, did it feel like a little shame around when I say hell but a little bit, I don't know why. But you guys just saved fucking hell of just so many fucking cats. They have so many cats and you're just doing such good work together. I just think it's so beautiful. So was it like, what was it? It was like 2018, and you guys were like, we need to shoot a photo like a book about this?

ANDREW MARTTILA: Yeah, at least as far as we met through mutual friends on the internet. And, um, as soon as I met Hannah, I knew she is a, a very unique person, like a once in a lifetime woman and I did my best to lock it down as soon as I met her. Honestly, um –

JVN: It's so hard to find a model slash cat activist, honey –

ANDREW MARTTILA: Tell me about it.

JVN: Because you are giving us the bone structure. Tell us Hannah, because –

HANNAH SHAW: Because like some people think they're like, ok, did Andrew get into cats through you? I found out about Andrew because of his cat photography and I was like, this photography is so beautiful –

JVN: On Instagram?

HANNAH SHAW: Yeah, I was like his photography is so beautiful –

JVN: I met my husband on Instagram!

HANNAH SHAW: Ahh! That's awesome. So literally, I saw his photos, these photos are beautiful, I want him to photograph some of my foster kittens and he came to photograph my foster kittens and I was like, wait, I didn't know he was like a cute guy. So then he showed up and I was like, is this guy single? I can't tell what's going on here. I don't know how to like find out –

JVN: And what year was this?

HANNAH SHAW: 2016. And we did like a live together. We did a live together and somebody in the live asked him if he was single and I was like, thank you and he said yes. And I was like, all right, here we go. So that's how we met was through a cat photo shoot and –

JVN: Do you still have their screen name? Because they should get a free copy of this book.

HANNAH SHAW: You know that live is still on youtube. Like you can go back and watch it. I haven't watched it –

JVN: That that person deserves, in my opinion, a free copy of this book because they kind of like, really helped facilitate this beautiful marriage. But that's so cute. So you already had this like common love of cats because you were already, you were already in the cat rescue space, Hannah. And you were in like the cat photography like passion space which we love and then you come together create this like cat saving duo because really the book is about like how different communities approach managing cat populations, right?

HANNAH SHAW: Yeah. So, I mean, I think sometimes when we are in like our bubble, we live in America, a lot of people in America feel like, you know, we must be the gold standard because we have so many animal shelters. Um, but we have very high institutionalization here. We have a lot of dependence on um our municipal governments and the shelters that they have um where a lot of parts of the world are much more community oriented, like perhaps they don't have the big municipal shelter system that we have here. But actually I would, I would take my uh I would prefer to be a cat in some of these other spaces because there's a lot more community empowerment um to save cats lives. And so, um I think, yeah, it's just really interesting to travel and see kind of the intersection of uh resources and culture and even things like politics and history and all these variables that sort of impact what a cat's life is like and then what the solutions need to be to help them. Um I found it really interesting kind of to return home from that with a new way of looking at my own country.

JVN: I mean, you guys really went all over the fucking place. I'm just going to say this really quickly. You went to Malaysia, Chile, the Netherlands, Puerto Rico, Oman, France, South Africa, Croatia, Japan, Dominican Republic, Kuwait, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Uruguay,

Thailand, England, all over the US, Kenya, Argentina, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Spain, Australia, Italy, Peru, Finland, Tanzania, Mexico, India, Greece, Nepal, Montenegro. Damn. What was the average of the time that you spent in each place, Andrew?

ANDREW MARTTILA: I would say on average, it was anywhere between 2 to 4 days. So maybe three days in each spot. So we really cranked this book out. Uh, we worked really hard every day that we were in a place we would wake up at, you know, 5 a.m. and work until 11 pm, crash, wake up to the next thing and uh it was grueling, but it was really the only way that we could make it work, you know, like we had to extract as much as we could with what little time we had.

JVN: I mean, these images are just absolutely, absolutely stunning. Oh, this fat little orange Netherlands cat. I love it! Where did you find, like, I remember growing up this one time we were on a road trip and a black cat ran across the street and my mom literally flipped a U turn on a highway like across the grass median to go get on an exit and like drive around like because she was like, that's we're on a road trip like that's a bad omen. Like we aren't doing that cats in so many cultures have so many superstitions, whether it's good superstitions, bad superstitions. Were there any places that had like specific or interesting uh ideas or superstitions around cats? For good or for bad?

HANNAH SHAW: Yeah, definitely. Um, when we were in Nepal and India for sure, we heard a lot of very similar stories of people saying like the black cat superstition is it's very serious there. So we had a friend that we made there who was telling us about being in the car with his employer, with his boss and they were like headed to work and a black cat was in front of them and they just didn't go to work that day because they like, couldn't find a way to get around this cat. Um which is to me like, wow. I mean, as somebody who, my best friend of 15 years was a black cat and um I just love them. It's like, oh my gosh, so interesting. But there are also places that have really positive superstitions about cats. So, like, for instance, Kotor Montenegro, um they have this belief there that um the cats are who saved that town from the black plague because they ate rats. So um cats are like revered in Kotor, they're like the symbol of the city. Uh because when you have cats again, like, they're seen as being like an important part of the community. And so um they're sort of like a good luck symbol.

JVN: Now, I also feel like, did I run across an article about like Australia and Melbourne? Like, isn't there something happening in? Because I feel like I read about this, but then you guys are dealing with this as well, like, what's, what's the cat situation in Australia?

HANNAH SHAW: Australia is like, honestly, I think if you asked me what one of the like, hardest and saddest places that we visited for cats –

JVN: Like she did not make the fucking top 10 –

HANNAH SHAW: No, like and not, not because there's not like amazing work happening there from individual rescuers. There's like some of the most inspiring rescuers we met were there. But when you go to shelters in Australia, you'll find that people are really frustrated there because the federal government kind of has this approach. Instead of sterilizing the community cats, they have an approach of like calling and killing, um, the cats who are outdoors. And it's, for me, it's really interesting because it's this idea of like, they call them different things there. They call them like a bush cat. So, like a feral cat that, like lives out in the bush like and is affecting the wildlife. But what the advocates in Australia told us is that there really are not a lot of cats there because um, cats –

JVN: It's like desert –

HANNAH SHAW: Yeah, cats all around the world, they congregate around areas of human settlement. So these laws are almost exclusively affecting cats who live in cities in urban areas. Um, so they call those cats urban strays in Australia. And so these, these, these laws that are meant to call bush cats are actually mostly affecting urban strays who live in areas where there, there is no, you know, protected wildlife there. They're living in, you know, the cities like in Melbourne. But what's hard is there's you kind of have this intersection of issues, right? Because also in Australia, it's very common to let your cats outside. So it's also affecting like people's cats, right? And so it's, it's really challenging, I would say like they do have a lot of animal shelters there, but they have very high rates of euthanasia because um there are not positive outcomes possible for a lot of these cats. So, um I found it really hard to talk with the shelter workers there because um you know, we want to be honest in this book about the issues that cats face. And um if this is not like a, we don't want to just sugar coat everything, but I always try to operate with that like lens of hope and lens of like the good work that's being done. And it was hard to squeeze that out of shelter employees in Australia because they're just so frustrated and sad about the reality that like it is not legal for them to do trap neuter return in the way that it is in much of the world.

JVN: So break that down for us a little bit. So like it, it was legal in Australia to do trap neuter return programs, but then they said no, no. So now if they get like a like a urban stray, they just policy is is to like bring it into a shelter and euthanize it?

HANNAH SHAW: Yeah. So if a cat comes into a shelter and there's no um adoption prospect for them or they are not able to be returned to their family. Um, you know, here in America, we kind of have, we have a similar history here in America where traditionally it's cats from the community and neonatal kittens who are the most euthanized in shelters –

JVN: No! Not neonatal kittens!

HANNAH SHAW: Why do you think I'm the kitten ladie Jonathan?

JVN: I know, you're so right.

HANNAH SHAW: This is what I do!

JVN: Well my best friend Patty, not to keep talking about myself, but my best friend Patty literally found a kitten that is so just like ripped off your Instagram page like fit in the palm of your hand. She, she fed it with a little beaker and they named it Mochi and I, I took one look at that cat and I was like, Patty, you're never getting rid of that cat like that. You're adopted that cat. And she's like, no, no, I have to like foster it. And because you know that's how you can and like she gave me the whole spiel that you gave me five years ago like nice because of it. And I was like, bitch, you're not a kitten rescuer. You are, you are you, Patty and you are not going to get rid of this kitten like this is gonna be your cat. And then literally like the next morning she was like, so its name is Mochi and I am gonna keep it and like he's so precious. He's like a gray and black like tabby like I'm, he's like, and he has the most but he looked like a little alien because he had like this big ass head and this like little body because he was like, I bet you he was like 6 to 8 weeks old, like really little.

HANNAH SHAW: Yeah, funny that you say that's really little because for me that's like huge. We only, we only do like the 0 to 8 week population. So an eight week old for me, I'm like, you're massive. You got to get out of my house. Like bye. I love you. Very nice.

JVN: When they were 12. Matilda and Genevive were like 10 weeks. But everyone else was like 12 because I got them from a shelter.

HANNAH SHAW: So we're like the pre we're like the pre adoption folks. So Andrew and I do neonatal kittens, we take kittens who are like, you know, yeah, like you say, fit in the palm of your hand hours old. Um, and so those are the two populations that like in America have traditionally been underserved is community cats. So cats who like don't have a home indoors who live outside and then neonatal kittens. That's why those are the two populations that I'm most interested in because like with the time I have on earth, I'm trying to create better outcomes for them through a variety of things. But um yeah, so in America now in a, in a like progressive shelter in America, if you bring in a community cat and you say like I found this cat and they're not social. Um they're not gonna euthanize that cat in a progressive American shelter. They're gonna say thanks for bringing us this cat. We're gonna neuter them. We're gonna, you know, vaccinate them and we're going to bring them back to the area they're from because this cat already has a live outcome in the community they're living in. Um, unfortunately in Australia it's a little bit more like, it has traditionally been in America where they bring that cat in and it's like this cat is a nuisance. Right. Like, they're like, it's like pest control, um, rather than –

JVN: They're, like, feral angry, they're not going to be able to get adopted. So we're just gonna –

HANNAH SHAW: We're just gonna euthanize them. Yeah.

JVN: So how does someone get into it? Like, were you overwhelmed? Were you nervous? Like what's your experience with being a neonatal cat rescuer been like?

ANDREW MARTTILA: Yeah, I think initially it was a shock to be taking care of such vulnerable creatures and to truly have their, their lives in your hands. So there's, you know, this great responsibility to do right by them. Um, Hannah gets me in all types of shit that, that I would have never signed up for otherwise. And I end up mostly appreciating those experiences. Um I'm remembering maybe three or four years ago, Christmas time on Christmas Day, she got it in her bones that we had to go rescue this mangy pig from down the street and put him in our bedroom um –

HANNAH SHAW: Where my mother was supposed to be sleeping. And I was like, oh, you can't sleep here because we got, we were calling him like the mangy Christmas hog. But because he was –

JVN: Did your mom have to get a hotel room?

HANNAH SHAW: I think she slept on the couch, like, ok, but with that, like, it was, there was like a hoarding case. This was like a, like baby.

JVN: It was a fucking emergency!

ANDREW MARTTILA: It was a nice thing to do. Absolutely.

HANNAH SHAW: And sometimes it's Christmas and you have to, like, rescue a piglet. I don't know, whatever piglet. I don't know what day of the year it is.

JVN: They're so cute. Piglets are so cute. I'm so triggered by a pig. Like they're so fucking cute.

ANDREW MARTTILA: I'm so allergic to pigs. And she was saying, oh, he doesn't sleep in the bed, he doesn't get in the bed. And all of a sudden I had hives all over my body from sleeping in my side of the bed, which could only come from one thing I think just like my standards of cleanliness have had to drop drastically as a result of being married to Hannah

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HANNAH SHAW: No!

ANDREW MARTTILA: But, but I, I love, I love the work that we do and I wouldn't trade it for anything. It's so fulfill and gratifying. Um and I, I love kittens and I love puppies to an extent. I don't love when they're shitting everywhere in my house. But listen, a life saved is a life saved. And it's, it's usually worth those couple weeks of discomfort to give a positive outcome.

JVN: What did you learn abroad and internationally about community cats? And how does that change your perception of how we take care of our cats in the United States and just in western culture?

ANDREW MARTTILA: Uh you know, I think we learned that there are so many different ways to interact with community cats and they all come from a place of love. So from a, from a western perspective, if you're seeing people take care of cats in other continents, it might look different and you have this feeling like you want to correct them or tell them, hey, you're not doing it like we would do it in the US, maybe you should do it another way we learned that by and large, like contingent upon where you are in the world. So like Hannah said earlier, climate, what kind of uh natural resources or resources are there, there are so many ways that you can leverage those things that are could only be done in these locations. So, um you know, when I, when I think about how the communities in uh UAE or in, in Greece, how they interact with the community, cats, it will look different, it will look different than it looks like in the US. And that's ok, like just because it, they, they use different things uh and operate on a different model, doesn't mean it's wrong.

JVN: Hannah, similar question, but a little bit of a divergence, which is how do you think that we can improve the lives of cats from a policy process? Whether that policy is like federal state or local?

HANNAH SHAW: Sure, thank you. Well, you actually just said something that is a future goal of mine, which I actually would love to be in public office someday because I think that there should be more uh young people and more women and uh like less like old white cis men um dictating everything that we do. So, yeah, I would love to be the mayor someday and when I am mayor, um no, I think that really –

JVN: Mayor Hannah Shaw sounds so hot like it gives me like an intellectual boner.

HANNAH SHAW: If I were mayor, like I would be directing municipal funds towards sterilization efforts because you know, we can kind of try to bail ourselves out of the ocean with a thimble all we want through adoption and fostering. But while we have this issue of like community cats procreating in exponential numbers, there's never going to be enough demand to meet that supply. So um I would say like one thing is um really like using municipal funding to go towards sterilization. So it's not just on the backs of the sweet people in the communities who have to fundraise themselves to do this. Um I would also say that like more emphasis on community empowerment and using using the resources of the

shelter I would love for people and governments to not see the shelter as a facility but to see it as a resource center, right So you find a kitten outside rather than saying like, oh, this kitten belongs in an animal shelter. Like we've tried that model. The reality is animal shelters don't have 24 hours to dedicate to kittens. So they are going to be euthanized there in most cases rather than doing that, like doing these diversion type programs where we say like, thank you for bringing us this kitten. Um, we are not an appropriate housing space for a kitten this age, but we'll give you the resources like we'll give you the education, we'll give you um the funding for the veterinary, we'll give you the supplies and we will be here on call to support you through this. Um it's very much the same that if we think of like child welfare in the past, we had a lot of orphanages, right? And now we've kind of decentralized that. So not saying at all that the foster care system in America is perfect for Children, but um it's a very different model than –

JVN: Yes.

HANNAH SHAW: Right, like centrally institutionalizing children, right? Like we know that animals do best, not in an institution. Um and humans do best not in an institution but in our community being cared for by other community members. So um yeah, if I were in charge of my city or county's budget, I would definitely be allocating resources towards um sterilization efforts uh to deal with the long term and in the short term, um towards efforts that enable community members to do good for animals without it becoming a burden for them and really just have the shelter be um there as a resource.

JVN: That's – I, so I have a few more follow ups because I think, I think I read in the prep for this or it could have been somewhere else. So forgive me. But because like doesn't like an un neutered girl cat, can't she have like so many babies in her life? It's like, isn't it like, isn't it a six, am I crazy? Was it a six figure number? Was it a five figure number? It was like a –

HANNAH SHAW: Yeah, like a well and you have to think too like, it's not just the cats that this, I mean, one cat can have, can be responsible for a huge, like exponentially growing number of, of cats because they can get pregnant at uh four months of age and then their gestation is just about two months so they can give birth two months later and then they can keep on going. Right. And now you've got these kittens and it's not just that some of those kittens are gonna, you know, be born and then they are going to reproduce. But think about all of the sadness and the loss because you know, kitten mortality is high. Like for every kitten that does survive and goes on to reproduce and reproduce and reproduce. We also have a lot of kittens who die on the streets. We also have a lot of kittens who go into an animal shelter and die in that animal shelter. And, you know, don't even get me started on how we keep data in America. But like we don't even know the, the untold numbers of neonatal kittens who die in animal shelters because their lives have historically been so insignificant that they're not even included in the data. Like they don't even, they don't even count. Um, and so yeah, this is why like my entire life's project is about kind of the trying to fix some of these systemic issues, but also trying to educate people so that really like the information and the resources are there to help people do good for these animals.

JVN: There is way too much supply and not enough demand and to come in and say that we're going to cull thousands and thousands and thousands of cats like kill thousands of cats when we haven't really given like a dedicated chance or trial or really given the good old college try to a TNR program nationally or even like, I mean, I'm sure maybe some states have better outcomes than others, but I don't really even hear about that many state funded

programs for this. And it's like this is an issue. It's not, it's a community issue. It's a big issue. It's not only for like cat lovers, but this should be something that we try to take on responsibly for like stray cats, stray dogs, we need public policy around it and until we deal with the supply and demand issue, this is go, it's like it's gonna keep getting worse. And so I thought the thing of what you said of bailing ourselves out of a sinking ship with a thimble, we can keep doing that. But it's like, I think about people like Jamie from Queer Eye and Safe in Austin like she's working her fucking ass off. Like if she's not out there trying to get donations, she's up shit's creek without a fucking paddle. And then all these other people are just like doing absolutely nothing. And I don't think that the answer is that we go in and we kill thousands and because I mean, really like trap neuter release, it's gonna, it's kind of gets to the same thing because they can't keep making babies. So it's like, you know, and I feel like euthanasia drugs probably aren't cheap and vets aren't cheap. So it's probably like even it probably is like a similar price to like put the cat down or neuter it.

HANNAH SHAW: Yeah. And I love that you bring that up. You would be like an amazing cat policy person, Jonathan because I, I've done a lot of policy work like with municipal leaders. Um and a huge piece of it is just money like, you know, maybe a politician doesn't care about like, you know, if you go in there with the cat ears on and cat hair all over your shirt crying and saying, like, stop killing cats. Like that's not as powerful of a message to a policymaker as going in and saying, like, listen, I'm a taxpayer. I don't want my tax dollars going towards like the incredible expense of impounding hundreds of thousands of cats who then you're having to spend the money on you like feeding them for a hold period. Ultimately, euthanizing them having to like dispose of their dead bodies. Like this is expensive stuff. It actually is cheaper for municipalities to just sterilize them and let them live their lives. Like these are cats who are already part of the community. I always tell people like if you're healthy enough to stay, you're healthy enough to stay. Um, you know, if you are in good body condition in the community, you're in these cats already have a community that cares for them. Just like anywhere in the book that we visited, you may not know who's taking care of them, right? Sometimes people go, I don't know. Oh, what if they're a, a somebody's animal or what if they're stray? Like these cats who live in the community and are healthy, they're healthy because somebody is taking care of them. Sometimes it's one person, sometimes it's 10 people. Like I used to take care of a cat in um a community cat in Washington DC. And um I named him Rufus and just quick story. I used to go and feed Rufus every day. I got him neutered. He had his little cute ear tip. One day I go to feed Rufus. Someone else is feeding Rufus. And I was like, oh, you met Rufus? And she said, who's Rufus? This is Vladimir. And I was like, oh my God, that's amazing. And she said I feed Vladimir every day. I was like, well, I love that for Rufus Vladimir. Um, so sometimes we don't know who's caring for them, but people all around the world care for animals and they do it best when there's support for sterilization. Um so that these cats at least are not like creating more animals, but certainly like, like any of us, you know, animals have a right to be in the community. I think that that's like the takeaway really is we live in community with cats all around the world. So like, let's do that with compassion.

JVN: I just had an idea to pitch you to take to politicians when you go, do your important work. Are you ready?

HANNAH SHAW: Yeah, please.

JVN: So, because a lot of our taxes, I'm guessing going to like animal control and like a lot like there must be like some government things that go to that. What if there was like, what if we could make animals almost like a dependent in some way? Like, not as much as like people like, because I feel like the parents would get pissed. But it's like if you take care of kittens or if you, like, rescue a kitten or rescue a puppy or something, if you were allowed to take like some amount of write off for what you spend on that pet for the first like six months or something, you're lessening the burden on your local shelters of having to, like, get like euthanize deal with the body. Pay the vets, da da, da pay for the animal control people. Maybe there's some sort of like tax situation or write off situation where they, it could just incentivize people to like, because I think a lot of people would, but it's like, finances are such a big reason why so many people don't adopt and don't foster because they don't have the money. And it's like if we could make that a write off for, you know, like may or maybe it's like if you make under a certain amount of money each year and you adopt a pet, then you can write it off. It's like, because I don't need to be writing off like, you know, if I adopt a kitten.

HANNAH SHAW: No, but I love the way that your mind thinks because it's not just like, I mean, we are individual as individuals, we can do a lot, but like when we try to address things at a systemic level, we can do so much more. Um, I will say like when people foster and they're fostering by themselves, like on their own, they find a kitten, they foster, it's so, it is so expensive. Right? And it's challenging to do. Um, this is why fostering for a shelter is so, or for a local rescue, you know, when you're a nonprofit organization, they are like tax exempt. So, you know, when you donate to them, it's tax exempt when that organization is, is taking care of all these, you know, debt bills and stuff like that. It's tax exempt. Um, so, you know, working with an organization is also really important because they cover all of those expenses for you. Um, traditionally, you know, it didn't used to be the case that shelters would be able to have the budget to cover supplies. That's something that we're working really hard. Um, with Orphan Kitten Club, we have funded, I don't know how many thousands and thousands of kitten kits for animal shelters. Um, and what we do there is, you know, provide the supplies so that when somebody signs up to foster, it's not a financial burden for them like the shelter can give them a kit to take home with all of the supplies that they need, so um –

JVN: If someone wants to get involved with the Orphan Kitten Club, who isn't involved already, do they? Is it or Orphan Kitten club.org or.com?

HANNAH SHAW: Yes.

JVN: Is it org or .com?

HANNAH SHAW: It's Orphan Kitten club.org. And the best way to help is just to join our club. When you join Orphan Kitten Club as a member, you get access to like really cute stuff. We send out these like little kitten trading cards as a thank you. Um, and you know, you can stay linked in with our community and kind of see the work that we're doing. We just wrapped up a campaign where we um fed 1 million meals to kittens and shelters. Um, and so we have all these cute pictures coming in right now from the shelter, sending us like their bottle baby photos of the kittens who are benefiting from this formula. Um, there's so many different like ways to attack these big issues, right? Like sometimes it's like access to resources, sometimes it's access to um you know, veterinary uh information, which is why we're doing the research piece. Obviously, education matters a lot and then just like inspiring people to

care, which is why Andrew and I do so much just like creating content and things like our book, I'm really hoping, you know, with cats of the world. My hope is that people get it for the fun photos and the travel content. And because it's like a beautiful coffee table book, but I'm hoping that they will take away some inspiration and some some new understanding of community, cats, community animals and honestly just um kindness towards other cultures and a a recognition that like just because you don't live in the same place, understand the culture as you understand your own doesn't mean that you can't have like a beautiful appreciation for the work that other people are doing.

JVN: But Orphan Kitten Club, is that like a 501c3 speaking the write off? So as people do donate, then they can just, it's a write off, there's no reason not to do it, it's a literal write off!

HANNAH SHAW: Yeah, it's a write off and we're coming up on end of year. So that's a huge time for nonprofits, you know, at the end of the year, um like people are doing their prepping for their taxes. If you want that right off, donate, you know, donate to whatever your favorite organization is. I hope it will be Orphaned Kitten Club because really like the way that we're able to dream bigger is through donation. Um, you know, we look at our budget and we set where we can, you know, cast our visions even bigger in the next year. And uh I'm really proud of what we've been able to do, you know, like five years ago when I talked to you, we didn't even have a grant program and we've been able to do \$3 million in grants since I talked with you. So the sky is kind of the limit, but it is about getting people to care and understand what's going on and feel passionate about, feel passionate about these issues. And um we don't expect anybody to donate who doesn't have the means to. But if you have the means then, you know, spread a little bit of that love. That's what we're trying to do.

JVN: On a completely different sidebar, do you guys have any good advice for like, because obviously we're very anti declawing in this house. Um, like do you level like it like do those glue plastic, like glue on the plastic cap things work or, or because like we just, we just like trim our cat's nails and then like, I kind of file four of them but Matilda will kill you if you try to file her nails. But um is it just kind of about trimming their little nails, keeping them short or do, have you guys found in like lots of scratching posts or have you found any, like, really good cat nail deterrents?

ANDREW MARTTILA: Yeah, I think uh giving them a different option. So if they, are they scratching your couch or whatever?

JVN: I'm pretty good. I feel like I got my situation figured out because like, I, I've been having cats for so long. So I got, I got like those corner couch cover scratching posts and like all my co and then I have just like one sacrificial couch that's like older and like, it's just it. Yeah. And it's just like, I mean, it wasn't like, it wasn't like a four figure couch. It was like a, it was like an affordable couch. I was like, I'm not going to try to protect you because like, this is the scratching post option. Like because they just always want a couch. Then the other thing that I've discovered is that outdoor grade velvet like out like outdoor velvet. If you're gonna like, if you, if you're a coinsey bitch and you can like custom, do a couch, which I did, I did two of my couches or custom, they really can't fuck that couch up like they've tried to. But like outdoor velvet, you would think like anything velvet. You're like, oh that must be weak. This outdoor velvet honey, they can't puncture their little shit ass rude nails through there and they're not shit ass rude. They're my babies but they do like to fuck shit up because they're kitten cat cooter and they can't help it. But I just didn't know if you guys had any, but I

just like, I just didn't know if I was missing anything but it's just like alternative things. The glue tips still don't work technology –

HANNAH SHAW: I wouldn't do the glue tips just because like having a respect for the anatomy of the animals in your home, I think is important. Like, you know, the, the cats in our homes, they are, they're cats, you know, we love cats because they're cats and cats are predators and cats have super sharp claws and they wanna sharpen their claws. Another thing that might be like a little endearing if you don't know, this is um cats actually, they're not just sharpening their claws when they scratch. They're actually like creating a family scent in the areas where you all are. That's why they often go towards their, uh, that's why they often go towards the couch is because your scent is there, the other cat scent is there and they're kind of like creating this family scent. Right. So I always think it's kind of sad that we're like stop creating the family scent –

JVN: Awe! Tooties!

HANNAH SHAW: It's like for them it's very natural. Right?

JVN: Matilda Tootie Tooties!

HANNAH SHAW: So we don't want to say, we don't want to say, don't do that. We just want to say like do that at a on a more appropriate place, right? So I have, we have scratch posts like right next. Oh hi, Ferguson –

JVN: Oh my god, I'm so happy to see Ferguson. Hannah. I was waiting for this to be over because I didn't want to ask because I haven't seen him in a minute and I know that like, it's like, you know, we just don't go fucking asking people about how their fucking animals are doing, you know, because we were gonna be respectful and everything. And I, and I really wanted to ask at the beginning, but I was like, in case something's like amiss, like I'm not gonna fucking like ask just at the very beginning of this because I want to like, have a great recording, but I am so happy to see Ferguson. I was actually just like, I was, I love Ferguson so much. I've really followed Ferguson's story and he looks so healthy and thickums and healthy boy headed boy with this perfect little tail. He's a healthy boy. I'm so happy to Ferguson.

HANNAH SHAW: Thank you. Yeah, he's 3.5 now and the vets told us not even to bother rescheduling an appointment for him when he was a kitten because they said he's not going to survive. And I was like –

JVN: Cause wasn't it his kidneys?

HANNAH SHAW: And I was like watch me, watch me.

JVN: Like, wow, they're just fucking perfect. Yes, honey. Oh my God. I, I if Larry needs, I'm so happy to see if I don't, I just, oh my God, it makes me so happy. I'm so that was like such good timing. Like Ferguson, you said that so well, like I have really been following that story like there was like a period there. I can't remember who asked you what, but there was one period where like in your caption, you had to be like you didn't literally say go fuck off. But just because I know you like it, I know your tone when you write something like it was like your way of being like don't be a fucking like prying ass fucking bitch. Like I'm going through it and like, I'm trying to fucking say this cat so just go fuck yourself like I'm paraphrasing there. But that was like what I took away from it. So then I never really wanted to ask

because I didn't want to like add, you know, onto any stress or anything. But I there was a phase there and like that 2020 12 era where every morning, like you can even ask Mark like God, I wonder how Ferguson is today.

HANNAH SHAW: Awe, that's really sweet.

JVN: No, I was like, really like, I was really, I think my mom and her prayer warriors like lit fucking candles for Ferguson in my hometown church. No, Ferguson was like, really on my mind because also, because remember how I was like, how aren't you on hoarders with just like 97 cats, like 97,000 cats? And you're like, because like, I really like, that's how I help more. It's like I gotta get them to the home. But then I will because I know like it's, it's a really big deal for you to like take on a forever cat. So when I thought you were taking on a forever cat, I just knew what that meant for you. And so I just like had such big feelings for Fergus. I still do. But I just, I'm so relieved.

HANNAH SHAW: Well Ferguson tricked us because he was supposed to be a foss this case because they told us this kitten is not going to live a long life. And I was just here weeping because I was working so hard to take care of him. And I was thinking like, you know, his brother got adopted and he didn't get adopted because he couldn't like, he's not gonna survive. So we kind of like, symbolically adopted him as a way to be like, Ferguson still gets a home even if it's like short and we're gonna just like, I don't know, I just get very emotional about stuff like that.

JBN: Totally.

HANNAH SHAW: So I was like, you know, even if your life is short, you like, got a home and it's with us and we put the little hat on his head and took his little picture and I was like, you know, we'll love you with the time you have. And that little boy tricked us because he's 3.5 now and he's running the house. He's like the king of our household and I'm so happy. I mean, I love that live forever, but it was a surprise.

JVN: I haven't gone this far over in an episode really long time. I'm obsessed with you guys so much. You both are so fucking cute. I can't get over it. You guys are the world's cutest couple. Like give it away. I normally don't say that for heterosexuals, but well, I don't know what you guys would like, but for a heterosexual couple, you guys are just so cute and I love you guys so much. And thank you for doing all of your good work. You guys, cats of the world. It's available now um by Hannah Shaw. Um photographer or photographer, Andrew Mart. Oh Wait, yeah. Martiella, oh my God. Marta.

HANNAH SHAW: Marttila.

JVN: No, I need to know to say it the right way. I just have a really hard gay midwestern accent.

HANNAH SHAW: No, nobody knows how to pronounce his name. It's Marttila.

JVN: But when I do the intro later it'll be Marta. Thank you. Yes. That's really funny because yesterday when I was running that through my head, I was like Martia and then when I was just, that's why I got confused because I was like, oh, that's definitely like not two L's. That's two Hannah Andrew. Thank you so much for coming on. Getting Curious. We love you so much. Keep up your good work and just we love you so much and stick around you guys for

a recap. And we're going to find out what we learned because I have a lot to break down and I'm curious about like 27,000 more things now. Thank you guys. Love you.

ANDREW MARTTILA: Thank you, Jonathan, love you.

HANNAH SHAW: Thank you so much, Jonathan. We love you too!

JVN: Some of the most interesting things that I took from the conversation I am or, and even kind of, this is a little bit mixed with what I'm curious about now, how do animal shelters record the deaths of neonatal cats? And, and what is the data on the euthanization rates? And, and how many animals are dying? I know that that's something that Hannah could speak to, but it just kind of came up towards the end of our conversation. But I am curious like, how do people report um animal animal welfare data? And um I'm also curious about like state laws around animal welfare. Like when we had like that Governor Kristen Nome who, like, murdered her dog. And then, you know, like, that's not even illegal in South Dakota. So it's like, what's the legalities around taking care of pets? And how do our states kind of stack up with each other? Um, I'm also really curious about like, how does animal control work? Like, what are the policies of our states? Like, does each state have their own policy on how this works? Is it each municipality? Um, what is the policies that dictate animal welfare and animal control? I think that's really interesting. Um, because there's just so much that, I don't know. Uh I also just found it fascinating all the different ways that people all over the world take care of their cats and, um, the ways that, you know, people view them differently, I just think is really interesting slash sad. Um, oh, and I'm, I'm curious about a lot now, I'm curious about like, how are these, how are folks that are, uh having to evacuate from hurricane zones? How are they getting their animals out? How are the animals and, and the folks bearing in these hurricane disaster zones? I'm seeing so much in social, I'm so worried for them. I think it's on the top of so many people's minds and are hurricanes getting more dangerous. I mean, there's like three hurricanes that are like active in, in the Atlantic Ocean right now. It's like the first time that's happened is since we've been recording hurricanes. So, what the fuck is that? Uh what's that all about? And what could central billionaires accomplish with 1% of their worth? Like once you have so many billions of dollars that you wouldn't notice if you lost a, you know, a billion of that, what could those people do? Um, so yeah, though, that's some of the things that I'm curious about. Um, and I just love you all. Thank you. So I'm also curious for how those uh studies wind up that Hannah and uh the Orphan Kitten Club are doing. So you guys, thank you so much for listening. If you can get involved in the Orphan Kitten Club or any of Hannah's work, I would love that for you. Um thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on Getting Curious.

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