

## An Ode on Fred the Cat

Like our self-starting founder Ben Franklin—  
Statesman, diplomat, thinker, believer  
In books as the building blocks of a thinking  
Nation of free people—

Our Fred the Cat  
Shed the stark limits of her humble birth  
For a lettered life at 269  
Main Street South.

Like young Hermes arrived on  
Olympus, ready to do big things, Fred  
Filled a gap in the lives of old people,  
Kids, other cats. Yes, Fred was a delight  
To so many old and lonesome people  
And children, offering homework assistance  
And challenging her neighbors and the world  
To talk openly about our values:  
Do we stick with our own kind or open  
Our hearts and minds to those who are different?  
Serve the greater good or surrender  
To an angry voice shooing Fred away  
In a letter to Governor O'Neill  
That the governor shooed back to our town?

This would be a local conversation  
Among town letter writers young and old  
Until the Gray Lady, like Athena  
Put it on the wire and people read  
About Fred from Maine to the Philippines  
And wrote in with a single, humane voice:  
*I suggest a little cooperation among the species....*  
*I am pleased that a member of the animal*  
*Kingdom has received such wide attention*  
*And approbation and has set such an*  
*Excellent example for your younger patrons....*  
*Thank God there are people to help lost and helpless animals....*  
A Las Vegas feline, lawyerlike, made  
A case for the value of workplace cats.  
Another took a philosophical  
View in line with Hippocrates: *Do no harm.*

On the tenth year of Fred the Cat's employ  
At the library, Woodbury's lawyers  
Found there was no case for kicking cats out:

Fred had earned her tenure as the town's feline,  
Earned the right to call her library home.

Closing this lesson on civic engagement,

The selectmen voted their agreement.

The world again wrote to Fred, offering

This postscript:

*Hats off to residents of Woodbury,*

*Connecticut, for allowing you to live*

*The rest of your natural life*

*In the only home you have ever had,*

*The Library....*

*Wanting to live in the library*

*Shows good taste, it sets a noble example*

*For us all. Would that more of us spent more time in the library!*

–Sandy Carlson, poet laureate, Woodbury, Connecticut

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