

I'm the cat whisperer



Julie-Anne Thorne has a very special relationship with felines, big and small – so much so, she's made a job of it.



Leo

Julie-Anne knows just how to help asthmatic moggy Leo

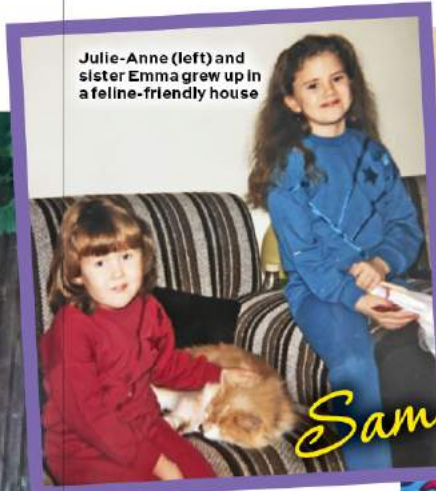
Healing hands helped Pickle's diabetes



Pickle

'If there's one thing I've learned'

'Cats are here to teach us, we just need to pause, pay attention and learn.'



Julie-Anne (left) and sister Emma grew up in a feline-friendly house

Sam



Now she helps every cat she can

Pickle

'I'm not sure what's wrong with her,' the woman explained. 'Her tummy is bare but she won't stop licking it.' I nodded, then turned my attention to the cat in question. I cleared my mind and focused.

It may have been over a Zoom call but I could instantly pick up on the nervous energy the poor kitty was exuding. 'She's very anxious,' I said immediately. 'Has anything different happened recently?'

As the woman explained they had a new kitten, it was clear. Cats don't like change and new animals should be introduced slowly. I made some suggestions to integrate the felines and then suggested some herbs and plants that soothe anxiety.

'And of course, don't stop with the veterinary care as well. It all goes hand in hand,' I instructed.

By the time the call ended, the woman was reassured. I knew the cat would be calmer and I was beaming. I couldn't believe how lucky I was to be doing the job of my dreams.

I'd always loved cats, ever since I was little. Not only did my parents have cats, but so did my gran and aunts. We

were definitely a feline family. Growing up, we had two – Sam and Missy. My sister, Emma, and I adored them both, so when Sam was knocked over by a car, we were devastated.

And we weren't the only ones. Missy changed overnight. From being independent and 'aloof', she became cuddly and very vocal, purring loudly whenever we were close. That was my first inkling that cats were far more emotional and sensitive than we give them credit for.

But the kitty who really

changed my life was Pickle. I got her when I finished university and had my first house. She was very poorly, with gingivitis and arthritis. Later, she was diagnosed with diabetes, which left her needing two injections a day.

Instinctively, I felt she needed more than the vet could provide. So I did diplomas in reiki healing, animal healing and feline zoopharmacognosy, then cat care, welfare and behaviour.

One night, when we were

sitting together, I held my hand over Pickle's tummy. 'Help me heal her,' I thought repeatedly. 'That was the first time I felt my hands go warm. I didn't think anything of it, but when I checked her glucose level, it was perfect – something unheard of for my poorly puss.

And when I met my now-husband Rob at a dinner party in April 2010 and Pickle fell in love with him as quickly as I did, I knew it was a good sign.

In 2012, Rob, now 37, and I had a day out at the zoo and when we went passed the cheetahs' enclosure, we couldn't see anything, but all of a sudden, I burst into tears.

'What's the matter?' Rob asked, anxiously.

'I really don't know,' I gulped through my sobs.

It was only as we were leaving and one of the zookeepers mentioned that the cheetah had lost her mate the day before, that I realised what my emotion was. *Grief*. Instantly, everything clicked into place.

Just like I'd suspected with Missy, all cats, even big ones, were very special creatures who experienced emotion the way we did. Not only that, but I also had a very special and powerful connection with felines and their feelings.

Back at home, I felt even more connected to Pickle and set up Naturally Cats, a company with the tagline, 'Helping cats and their guardians with a range of issues they face together using a natural and holistic approach.'

It seemed like the perfect

way to use the new skills and natural abilities I had to benefit both guardians – I don't think of them as owners – and their feline friends.

In my new role as a holistic cat therapist and behaviourist, I helped people look at the emotional needs of their cat

regularly. I used environment enrichment, behaviour modification, energy work and botanical remedies and it was fantastic to see the difference I could make.

I'd check whether cats had the correct surroundings, enough litter trays, the right

'I help people look at the emotional needs of their felines'

and how to understand and reconnect with them.

It started off more like a hobby, alongside my civil servant job in Plymouth, but over the years, I slowly built up a range of clients, some who had one-off consultations, others who worked with me

toys and stimulus around them. Then I'd look at the behaviour of both the cat and the human – you wouldn't believe the difference the person's actions could make, especially with anxious or aggressive cats.

Then, I could also offer energy work to cats who needed

it and botanical remedies. We all know that chamomile is soothing for humans, and it has the same effect on cats, so putting some of the dried flower on a pillowcase, you'll often find that cats will go and investigate or roll on it, easing their mood.

Last year, business was booming. 'Cats don't like change,' I explained repeatedly. 'They are finding it as difficult as you are to adjust to life in lockdown. They're used to having time to themselves.'

In July, I eventually found the courage to go full-time with my animal ambitions – it felt like jumping off a cliff, but so far, it's going brilliantly.

I've helped hundreds of cats, either on a one-to-one basis, or through my webinars and Facebook lives. I've also co-authored a book, *The Aromatic Cat*, with an old colleague, to give people more information about using essential oils and herbs to benefit their cat's welfare.

Sadly, Pickle passed away in October 2018 and in May 2019, Rob and I welcomed Leo, a gorgeous black kitty, into our family. He is a bouncing ball of fluff who I bonded with immediately. When Rob stroked his back as he was lying down, Leo flicked his tail.

'Don't do that,' I said immediately. 'He doesn't like it.' 'How do you know?' Rob asked in amazement. I can't explain it, but I just do.

Since he came to us, sadly Leo was diagnosed with asthma.

'Could we not have a healthy one for a change?' Rob groaned.

But I shook my head, smiling. 'No, he's meant to be ours. We'll take care of him in ways that other people might not.'

And at 38, I know that's my role in my life. Giving cats a voice and helping them to be understood.