



**Ralph Finch tries to find a purrfect story**  
(and misses by a mile, some critics reply).



**[Left]** A trick photo of our cat and its whiskers. Trick? Because the cat looks nice. Usually, it doesn't even let me touch it! Photo by Janet Finch.

**[Right]** Cat whisker container.

**And in this article, Ralph suggests that you aren't the only strange collector out there.**

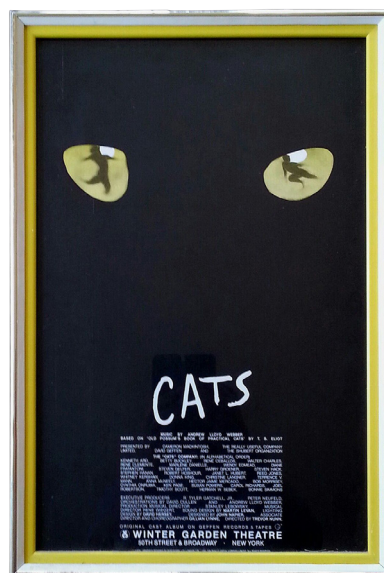
When one has been collecting for 55+ years and has had the privilege of meeting hundreds of collectors from several countries, one discovers that some collectors are downright strange.

We seek matters from A (art) to Z (zoological ephemera...really?) and often go out of our way to find a name for our eccentricities, trying to make our passions sound less—peculiar. Like the other day, when an auction house emailed me with its upcoming “Automobilia–Garagenalia” sale...Garagenalia?

Hmmmm. The next time I look at my desk, I will explain to critics—especially my wife—that I am into “clutterenalia” and point to the sign on my desk that proudly claims, “A cluttered desk is a sign of Genius.” A coincidence? When I went to find the sign to check the wording, I couldn't locate it. There was too much stuff on my desk. (Janet commented that it was a message from God.)

But let's get back to the topic at paw—I mean hand—Cat-related stuff, a topic I've not even begun to scratch. It all goes back some 44 years when a friend, Jerry McCann of Chicago, talked about his recent visit with a friend who was...OK, a pack rat.

Jerry said that anything that entered this person's home was des-



**[Left]** *Cats* is a sung-through musical with music by Andrew Lloyd Webber. It is based on the 1939 poetry collection *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* by T. S. Eliot. The musical tells the story of a tribe of cats called the Jellicles and the night they make the “Jellicle choice” by deciding which cat will ascend to the Heaviside Layer and come back to a new life. As of 2024, *Cats* remains the fifth-longest-running Broadway show and the eighth-longest-running West End show.

tinued not to leave. There were large stacks of old newspapers that half-filled one room—in fact; the guy had a cot behind the piles where he slept. (I later attested to Jerry's stories of this odd person when I also visited him and noticed old gold coins in a ratty desk drawer.)

Also odd—and we are getting closer to the subject of this story—were large boxes filled with used—but washed—old mayonnaise jars.

Then, in the man's cluttered kitchen, Jerry found something odd: Taped to the refrigerator door was...(a drum roll, please) a whisker! Jerry stared at it, tried to make sense of it, and finally, his curiosity drove him to ask, “What is this?”

“A cat whisker,” the guy replied, and that logically demanded another question, like “Why?” The man had a somewhat sensible answer, explaining that this cat would occasionally lose a whisker, and he picked them up and kept them. And here is the kicker, adding that he didn't really have use for a cat whisker at that time, but if he ever did, he knew right where one was.

(I think that various variations of the “sense” are used by many of us “collectors,” and—I'd bet—with little acceptance by our spouses.)

The cat whisker taped to a refrigerator story I've been telling for decades. In fact, decades ago, when my own cat lost a whisker, I picked it up and put it in an envelope!

The cat whisker man died 30 years ago, but I always wonder: What happened to his whisker collection?

And just recently, I was chatting with a collector friend in New York State, and the cat whisker story came up. Again.

I was so delighted to be reminded that the world is filled with...um, a variety of interests, and while this New York guy had a serious glass interest, he also had a modest interest in cat whiskers!!!

And this guy—his name is Chester Grosfky of Buffalo, New York—had an explanation for having whiskers in a jar, and he even topped my story.

See, his family has a cat, and the kids occasionally found their cat's whiskers and, with childlike curiosity, kept them in a jar. One day, Chester was at a circus in New York State and met a lion trainer. He told the guy, "*This may sound odd, but...do you have any lion whiskers*?" "Sure," the guy replied, explaining that the big cats often lose whiskers, and in a few minutes, he came up with several genuine lion whiskers.

Chester's kids were thrilled but added: "*They are like broom whiskers.*"

So, this cat incident reinforced my answer to the many times my wife would ask: "*What is this, and what are you planning to do with it?*" "I don't know," I always say, but then add: "*If I need one, I know where one is.*"

I'm almost 84, and what are the chances of meeting a third collector of cat whiskers? I thought that this, indeed, was the cat's meow!

I can also imagine that one day at an AA meeting—even though I don't drink—I can stand up and admit: "My name is Ralph Finch, and I'm a collector of cat whiskers."

**FYI #1:** The phrase "the cat's meow" originated in the 1920s to mean something excellent or outstanding. Variation of that is "the bee's knees" or "the cat's pajamas."

**FYI #2:** Oddly enough, several restaurants in various states have named themselves with this cute pet name: "*The Cat's Meow.*" Clearly, eating there, you should be prepared to say, "*Waiter, there is a hair in my soup.*"

**FYI #3:** OK, you just got a few facts, a touch of humor(?), a restaurant "review," and a bad joke. What do you want for nothing?

**FYI #4:** On the Internet: "*10 Facts You Didn't Know About Cat Whiskers,*" while another pleads: "*I'm not the only one out here collecting my cats' whiskers, right?*"

Another weirdo admits he has "*15 years worth of whiskers my cat has shed.*" (I wonder if he lived in Chicago?)

I even found two websites featuring cat whisker puns, and one included advice on "*Using Cat Whisker Puns in Everyday Conversation.*"

And you can buy one of several different ceramic devices on which to save your cat whiskers (\$10 to \$37); one item will print on it your short cat's name unless, perhaps, your cat's name is "*Mr. Mistoffelees,*" the cat with so-called magical powers from the musical *Cats*.

But enough is enough, and I'm tired of the topic. I think I'll take a cat nap.



**[From the Editor]** We had some extra magazine space here so I thought I would place some "cat" bottles for fun. Believe me, there are not many. Pictured is a B 165 "Botanic (motif sphinx) Bitters Herzberg Bros. New York" from the Meyer collection and an "Ornate Liquor Bottle" embossed (Mortar and Pestle) "L S & CO" (monogram) "CHICAGO, ILL" - (Griffin) (Front view of the Sphinx) (Human-Headed Lion). The neck is in the form of an Egyptian Obelisk and is covered with hieroglyphics as are the other areas of the bottle. From the *American Antique Glass Masterpieces* Houston 2024 exhibition and book (plate 141). The blue cat decanter is from the Internet. There are many bitters with "Cat" in the name such as "*Catawba Wine Bitters,*" Brown's *Catalina Bitters*" and the super rare "*Drs. Horning and McKee's Dog and Cat Hospital*" bottle. I am also feeling a little "anxious" working on this article. Is it just me or is there some subliminal tension because we are dealing with cats and the author is named Finch?

