

Hemingway Cats' Battle Is Over

Cat lover and CAT FANCY Consumer Marketing Manager Suzanne Stowe blogs about her visit to the Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum in Key West, Fla.

By Suzanne Stowe

Posted: Sept. 29, 2008, 5 p.m. EDT

This is the famous cat drinking fountain.

Last week, the Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum in Key West, Fla., announced it reached an agreement with the federal government that lets the 50 or so cats continue to live on the grounds as long as they don't leave the property. The agreement ends a five-year battle that could have resulted in the kitties being removed or caged.

I was very happy to learn the news since the Hemingway Home is my favorite place in Key West. I have been lucky enough to visit the Home and Museum twice; the most recent visit was this past March.

When I met with the staff in March, they weren't at liberty to discuss the lawsuit but were hoping for a resolution that would allow the cats to stay on the grounds. The Hemingway Home is a wonderful environment for the cats with plenty of space, beautiful gardens and lots of human visitors if the cats want attention. The tour guides also dispense lots of love to the special six-toed kitties. There are also plenty of place for the kitties to curl up and take a nap uninterrupted, if that's what they prefer.

Here is Spencer Tracy parked on my shoulder. One of the more interesting features of the Hemingway Home gardens is the most famous cat- drinking fountain in the world. Hemingway had it built for his pets. The top of the fountain is an old Spanish olive jar that was brought from Cuba. The trough at the base of the olive jar came from Hemingway's good friend Joe Russell, owner of the bar Sloppy Joe's. It is actually one of the bar's urinals. Hemingway acquired the urinal when the bar was remodeled and Hemingway's wife, Pauline, added the decorative tile to disguise its original use. Now, when the cats get thirsty, they can mosey up to the fountain and drink up.

Charlie Chaplin posing with one of the guides. Note his handsome mustache. If you get a chance to visit Key West, be sure to add a visit to the Hemingway Home. When I last visited, there were 47 cats in residence and about half of them carried the polydactyl (extra toes) trait. Visitors are not supposed to pick up the cats, but if you sit down on a bench, one of them may jump up on you. And you are free to pet any cat that feels like getting love.

A big white cat named Spencer Tracy took a liking to me. He climbed up on my shoulder and purred away. I was really missing my three cats, so being able to spend time with Spencer was very therapeutic. I'm so glad to hear that Spencer and the other cats get to stay in their home and continue to thrill the many cat lovers that visit them every year.

[Back to the Crazy for Cats by Suzanne Stowe homepage](#)