



# CULTURE CLUB



## Papa's Polydactyls

Those cool Hemingway Cats

BY TOWN TRAVIS

**G**enerations of mutated cats squatting in a Key West home could be problematic for some. That was the heart of the matter in a dispute between the Hemingway Home and Museum and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In September 2008, an agreement was reached between the two parties determining that the nearly 50 polydactyl cats – better known as “Hemingway cats” because of the author’s affinity for them – can stay put as long as they are fenced in and the museum passes USDA inspection. The decision follows a lengthy court battle that began when the Feds threatened to fine the Hemingway Home (and evict the cats) for not having an animal exhibition license.

The felines roaming the Key West estate have a genetic abnormality called polydactyly, meaning “many fingers.” Where typical cats have four toes on their front paws, these cats can have up to three extra digits – often appearing as a thumb on each paw, which sometimes lends the animals a certain degree of dexterity. It’s similar to humans having extra »

Holy cat toes, Batman!

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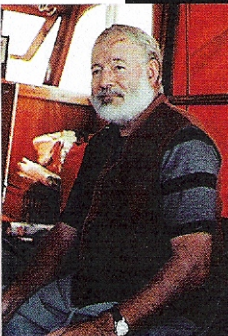
fingers on each hand – which some actually do, since cats are not the only mammals that can carry the abnormality.

Despite his love for big-game hunting and the gore of bull fighting, Hemingway had a soft spot for smaller animals – particularly cats. An inveterate story-lover, Hemingway became enthralled with the legend of “gypsy cats” – seafaring felines welcomed on clipper ships for their enhanced abilities as mousers, due to their extra toes. In the 1930s, after hearing of Hemingway’s interest, a ship’s captain gave him a six-toed cat named

Snowball that sired the line of cats still residing at the Hemingway Home.

The anomaly isn’t inherently dangerous, and, in fact, is thought harmless by most vets. The gene affects the digits during the embryo stage and becomes most prevalent on the front paws. The cats may also have extra dewclaws (vestigial claws on the rear of the leg above the foot), and polydactyl cats may carry the trait without exhibiting the crazy paws.

Long before arriving in Key West, polydactyl cats were allegedly spotted about 500 years ago in the Norwegian Black Forest. They popped up again in England in the 1800s, where their extra toes were their death warrant – polydactyl cats were executed as “witches’ familiars.” Charles Darwin mentioned “families of six-toed cats” in his book *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication*. Despite their calamitous history, these feline freaks of nature will always be considered sidekicks of one of America’s beloved authors.



## LATITUDES OF ATTITUDE

Researchers explain the link between location, behavioral traits and cultural stereotypes

**S**ure, we all know a typical Californian or two, and a family member you could only describe as “sooo New York” – but who knew there are actually researchers out there validating our favorite stereotypes? Richard Florida, an expert in demographic trends, says certain personality types tend to gather in the same geographic locations. He breaks behaviors into five classifications along with where these types typically call home. – JENNIFER A. FREEMAN

### “KEEP THE OLD STYLE FLOWING”

Extroverted types are defined as having energy, positive emotions and the tendency to seek stimulation and the company of others. They are likely to gather in the band that stretches from the Chicago area down to Southern Florida. This may explain why Chicago is home to a significant number of sales professionals and over-exuberant, booze-guzzling sports fans.



### “SUP BRAH? IS THAT YOUR SISTER?”

Open-to-experience types have appreciation for art, emotion, adventure, unusual ideas, imagination, curiosity and variety. Those who exude openness are likely to drift and gather in bustling hotspots, i.e., L.A. and San Francisco. This is no accident; “open-to-experience” personalities are naturally adventurous and are more likely to move farther distances, Florida says. He also found that Southern California has a high concentration of single young men – perhaps open to the experience of meeting hot, young actress-wannabes.

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