

The Cat Who Would Not Eat

Michelle Bernard and Pumpkin

When Pumpkin decided she wasn't going to eat her new, healthier diet, her guardian Michelle pulled out all the stops to change her mind.

Most cats consider the switch from commercial pet food to a home-made, raw-food diet to be the best thing to come along since catnip. But there are those few who decide that the food they're used to is REAL food, and everything else is not even worth sniffing. If you've ever had to deal—or are currently dealing—with a finicky cat, you'll be heartened by the experience of Michelle Bernard, whose two-year old Pumpkin took the phrase "hunger strike" to a new, nightmarish feline extreme.

Michelle is a very busy full-time legal assistant/part-time student/professional cat sitter living in Boston. She decided to change her two cats' diet from dry food to a more natural diet after happening upon Anitra Frazier's *The New Natural Cat* in August of 1993. Rooney and Pumpkin were not impressed. "They looked at their first dish of Pet Guard supplemented with Ms. Frazier's Vita-Mix formula like it was some sort of joke and walked away,"

Michelle told us. "Rooney made sure he 'buried' the nasty stuff before he left." Nevertheless, as per instructions, Michelle cleared the uneaten food away after 45 minutes.

After a day and a half of this, Rooney broke down and tried the new food. Pumpkin, it seems, is made of sterner stuff. "She absolutely refused to even lick the food," Michelle said. "She simply smelled the plate and walked away. After four days of not eating, I was beginning to worry. I've had Pumpkin since she was six months old. Before I adopted her, she lived with a colony of feral cats in a parking lot eating who knows what. Pumpkin has always had a very limited concept of 'food'—namely dry cat food and cooked shrimp. I was never able to entice her to try anything else."

According to Michelle, a limited palette wasn't Pumpkin's only problem. "She fit Anitra's description of a walking 'dandruff puff.' As she is a black cat, the dandruff was very evident. In addition to this, her coat was quite greasy." Michelle felt certain that the dry food Pumpkin had been eating was "doing a number on her coat," and held her ground when it came to providing the new food.

THE STANDOFF

Pumpkin was not about to back down either. As her self-imposed fast dragged on into its fifth day, Michelle started to panic. She called several local vets, hoping to learn of a strategy or temporary appetite stimulant or anything which would get the cat to eat. Instead, she got horror stories about cats starving themselves to the point of liver disease or death. Michelle capitulated and let Pumpkin have dry (Pet Guard) food. Pumpkin chowed down with gusto, and Rooney looked a little miffed, wondering how she rated.

This scenario was repeated several times over the next few weeks. If Michelle attempted even to feed Pumpkin dry food on a schedule, she'd revolt. "Unless I was going to leave the



