

It'll be lonely this Christmas...



**NOT  
WHEN YOU  
HAVE A CAT!**



Elizabeth Sulis Kim has written for magazines and newspapers including 'The Guardian', 'The Independent', and 'Glamour'. She grew up with cats in the West Country and used to volunteer at a cat shelter in Italy. She now lives with her husband and senior cat, Misty.

Elizabeth Sulis Kim discovers why celebrating Christmas with your cat alone can be full of comfort and joy.

**“**We all know how calming it is to hear the soft purr of a contented sleeping cat, to feel warmed by their presence.**”**

**W**hen on the lookout for people who'd spent Christmas alone with their cats, one person said: "Sounds like the perfect Christmas to me! Where can I sign up?". I had to laugh and agree.

My own recipe for a perfect day is a good book, a lapcat, and a glass of wine. That said, the festive season is sold to us as a time for togetherness. Christmas Day is a time for gift giving, indulgent dinners with family, and a shared sense of déjà vu, reminiscing on Christmases past, conjured up by the smell of pine and mulled wine. The problem with this image is it amplifies loneliness in those among us who unwittingly find ourselves alone during the festive season.

We can find ourselves in this predicament for a number of reasons: a break-up or divorce, family estrangement, bereavement, singledom, living abroad or work. When everyone else is together, being alone feels all the more significant.

You're not alone in feeling lonely. A survey has found only 62 per cent of the British population will spend Christmas Day with their immediate family, while research from Age UK shows that nearly a million people aged 65 or over feel lonely at Christmas.

If you're reading this and it resonates, the likelihood is you're not quite alone — you may live with a cat or look after cats.

Studies have shown that living with a cat or dog can help alleviate loneliness, but perhaps we didn't need a study for that. We all know how calming it is to hear the soft purr of a contented sleeping cat, to feel warmed by their presence.

At Christmas, cats don't expect a mound of gift-wrapped presents beneath a tree, a turkey dinner with all the trimmings, Christmas pudding, and all that booze. Without guests to entertain or a host to please, you can eat and drink what you want, watch what you want, and there's no need to decorate the house or spend hours in the kitchen, if you don't fancy doing so.

**Case study**

**“**On the day I was quite happy for the peace and quiet**”**

**C**hristmas alone wasn't as bad as Emily Cleary, who lives in Buckinghamshire, expected. She recalls a Christmas spent alone with cats Jack and Sophie. "My family all had other plans. I didn't want to feel like a gooseberry at someone else's celebration, so decided to stay at home then do a night shift because it was triple pay!"

Rather than wake up early to unwrap presents, Emily enjoyed a lie-in on Christmas Day. She called her mum then fed the cats, before watching telly with them on the sofa. "Then I cooked myself a pizza and didn't even get dressed until about 3 o'clock in the afternoon," she says.

In hindsight, Emily thinks she was probably more upset about being alone before the actual day. "On the day I was quite happy for the peace and quiet. My cats were very affectionate so I got lots of cuddles and attention, then I gave them a cat Christmas stocking treat and headed out to work at about 6 o'clock."

Today, Emily is married with two children. "Circumstances have changed, but I would say if anyone is dreading the prospect of Christmas alone with their cat — don't — it can actually turn out very well!"



Emily's cats gave her lots of love and attention.

## Case study

"It was lovely and there was no awkward small talk"

It turned out well for Lisa Phillips, now based in Northamptonshire, who spent Christmas alone with her cat Nora three years ago. "I was in Sydney, Australia at the time. Most of my close friends had returned to the UK. I received a few offers to spend Christmas with other people, but I chose to stay at home and spend the day with Nora."



Lisa and Nora.

Having no guests to entertain didn't stop Lisa and Nora from sharing a turkey dinner, and watching a Christmas movie snuggled up together on the sofa. "It was so lovely and there was no awkward small talk," she says.

Given a chance, she would repeat, but, unfortunately, Nora passed away last year. Nora, she says, was her best friend and the best possible companion.

## Case study

"Staying home with Midnight was exactly what I needed"

The decision to spend Christmas alone with a cat doesn't have to signal a big familial schism or an aversion to the holiday season. Charlotte Richardson Andrews lives in Kingston, Surrey, and usually enjoys celebrating the holidays with friends and family. "I love the hustle and bustle of Yuletide — the big family dinners, the traditional Christmas Eve drinks I do with my closest friends."

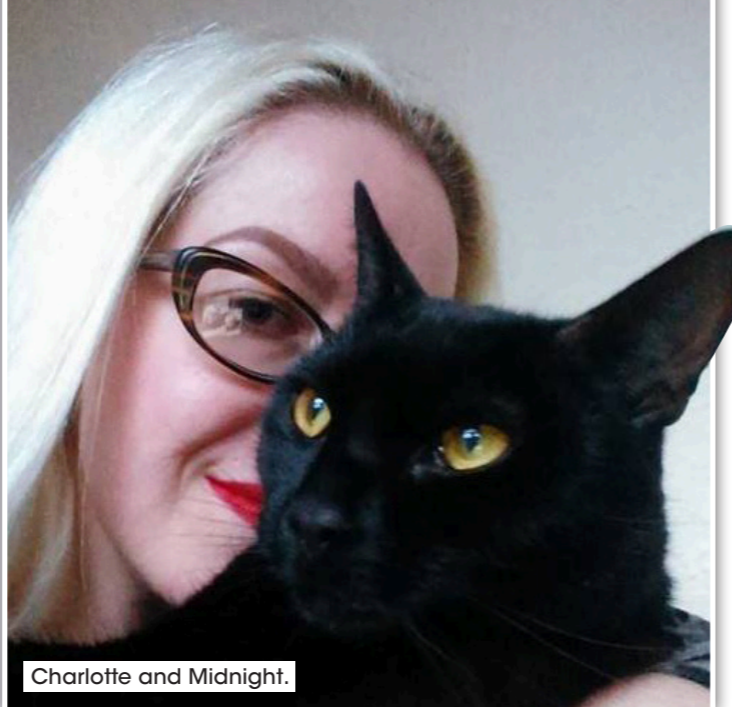
A few years ago Charlotte decided to spend Christmas alone with Midnight — affectionately known as Middy. She says: "It'd been a particularly full-on December, and the idea of staying at home, forgoing all of the usual obligations, was very appealing. I also had a horrid cold, so that decided it for me."

Charlotte and Midnight spent the entire day curled up on the sofa, watching Christmas films, and tucking into a pile of vegan mince pies. Midnight, meanwhile, got to enjoy her own treats. "She has her own Christmas stocking; we take it out of storage every year and stuff it full of treats for her to prise out at her leisure... It was bliss! Staying home with Midnight was exactly what I needed." Would she repeat it? "In a heartbeat," she says.

As a freelancer, Charlotte spends a lot of time working from home anyway. "Being self-employed can be a lonely thing, but having Midnight around makes all the difference."

In the end, Christmas is just a day, and an exhausting and expensive one if we remember millions of people are in debt come January. The cultural importance we place in togetherness can be upsetting when we find ourselves alone, but are you really alone if you're with a cat? I think not.

Cats are often the best company: no small talk, predictable needs and wants, plus you won't be as in debt in the new year. Cat lovers know there is no better joy or sense of togetherness than having a purring cat curled up on your lap. Now to echo the words of that aforementioned aspirational case study: where can I sign up?



Charlotte and Midnight.

## Case study

"I remember feeling very glad that I was going to have the cats to keep me company"

While many people involuntarily find themselves spending Christmas alone with cats, many cat-sitters do so out of choice. London-based house-sitter Anne Marie Jackson, spent last Christmas alone with someone else's cats, Daz and Gem. "There was a hiccup in my relationship so I ended up being alone," she says.



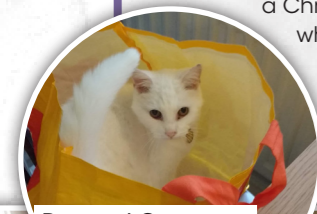
Anne Marie.

"I remember feeling very glad I was going to have the cats to keep me company. The cats' owner had set up a Christmas tree in the sitting room, which is where we spent the evenings. It was a cosy flat, and Gem was on my lap and Daz sat by my feet.

"For a long time now Christmas for me has been more about togetherness than anything else... I was still sad, but not nearly as sad as I would have been.

"Cats are very effective communicators, so even if they can't use words, you're still having conversations with them all the time!"

This year, Anne Marie will have both human and feline company.



Daz and Gem looked after Anne Marie at Christmas.

