

706 Words

### Cat Catcher Layman Smith

Some time back, I went to the Twin Oaks Apartments in Houston to visit a friend. As I walked into the patio area, I stopped at apartment # 239. I was curious about a stack of wire cages near the door.

A slender little fellow eased out the door and said, "You know a smart dog knows his dog-catcher. There are cats in this town that know their catcher too."

That's how I met Cat-Catcher Layman Smith. He gently nudged a cat back inside his apartment before closing his door. "They ain't dumb, you know."

I was still curious about his traps.

Layman told me he built the cages and used them in his business of catching stray cats. He said, "I have cats just waiting to be caught."

Then, the Cat-Catcher told me his story. It started when his landlady of the Twin Oaks Apartments asked Layman to help her get rid of strays. Cats roamed everywhere.

He bought wire and made twelve cages. A trap door closed behind the cats when they entered for a bite of food. Layman Smith soon caught all the pesky wild cats around his apartment complex. But, being a kind soul, he kept every one of them inside his apartment.

The landlady bragged of Layman's success. His reputation spread to other apartment managers all over town. He got job offers to catch more strays. \$10.00 per cat. At first, he caught only two and sometimes three strays at new places. The low pay discouraged him. By then, he was feeding 38 cats in his apartment.

Layman told me, "That's about the time this business idea came to me. I haul a carload of my fat cats to another apartment complex; and I quietly turn them loose. After three or four days, they get hungry. The owners get annoyed. I get a phone call. Makes a good payday in less than a week.

"Working cats are sort of like working dogs -- you've got to reward them for a job well done. Sometimes I catch two cats in one cage. My cats stand in line to get caught --I'm telling you. They know I feed them plenty. Sometimes one will be left out but he'll just hop in the back seat while I load the cages.

"But this business ain't all profit. I figure I spend about \$4.00 per cat on food between working assignments; and then there's the Business Cards and little Brochures. And gas in my old car."

He said, "Competition too. I had a pest control company try to muzzle in on my business once. They couldn't catch but two or three cats in a week. And every one they caught, they put to sleep. Lost their business right there."

He invited me into his apartment to meet his workers. I saw cats on his couch, on the tables, and all over the floor. Layman said, "Business is gett'n so good I had to haul a bunch of my cats to my daughter's house on the edge of town. Built more cages, too. I have seven crews working this week."

We stepped over and around cats as I was leaving. He said, "Oh, yeah, and this old big cat here -- that's Pete. He's retired now. Just stays home to kinda keep the new cats in line. I don't have names for a lot of them yet. My turnover is pretty high. But some that I haven't seen in weeks show back up when they need a job for something to eat."

That sucker was still grinning while I was trying to close his door. He held the door slightly ajar and peeked out to me, "I catch 'possums and armadillos too. Can't train

them so I let them go -- right on the spot. I've got enough mouths to feed in my working cats. But I never charge my customers for any animal I catch that I don't haul off. Now, that's good business; and I ain't one for cheat'n my customers."

After my visit, I drove home and checked around my area. I spotted twelve skinny, unemployed cats. But I forgot to get Cat-Catcher Layman Smith's telephone number.