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Beautiful Loser

By Jill McWhinnie

When a departing staff member of Ringwood's Town and Country Animal Hospital asked Dr. Brian Laing to take in Frisky, one of her farm cats, the good doctor did so with some trepidation.

Frisky, an orange and white short hair, was not your typical lean, mean barn cat. He had come to the farm as a "rescue cat" two years before, and appeared to have monopolized the food dish for most of that time. When the corpulent kitty moved in with Dr. Laing in 1995, he tipped the scales at 25 pounds - not the most appropriate image for the resident feline of a veterinary office.

Clearly something had to be done about Frisky's weight. "How could I look a cat owner in the eye and tell him his cat was obese when I had the fattest cat in the world living right in my own office?" said Dr. Laing.

Reducing a cat that size to a normal weight, which is about 11 pounds, would not be easy. "Cats are sedentary, so exercise is not part of a cat's weight loss program," explained Dr. Laing. "And a crash diet is not an option for a cat, as it can lead to development of hepatic lipidosis, a serious liver condition."

The answer was a specially formulated weight loss cat food, which restricted calories but not protein and nutrient delivery, and allowed Frisky to take off the weight over several months. "He did 'plateau' at one point and we had to redo the calculations and reduce the amount of food provided," said Dr. Laing, adding that veterinary supervision is essential for such a drastic weight loss.

After nine months, Frisky had achieved a remarkable weight loss of 13 pounds. As a result, "he required a bit of surgery on the sagging, loose skin around his eyes - the feline equivalent of an eyelid tuck."

As he lost weight, the cat's personality began to change for the better. "When Frisky first came to us he spent most of the time upstairs, sitting by his food bowl. As he lost weight, he became more sociable and active, and started coming downstairs, interacting with the pets and owners in the waiting room," recalled Dr. Laing.

"You'd think a cat would have caused havoc, but he appears to have had the opposite effect. The dogs didn't growl at him, there were no fights and he seemed to calm the waiting animals down." So began Frisky's 15 year career in customer service with the Town and Country Animal Hospital.

Not long after Frisky's arrival, a client brought in a badly injured kitten she had found abandoned in the A&P parking lot. After life-saving surgery, the handsome long-haired kitten with the magical green eyes joined the clinic's feline family and was named Harry Potter.

"Harry and Frisky became life-long friends. There were no territorial disputes," said Dr. Laing. "They had the run of the whole office but often ended up crowded together on the little table in the front window of the waiting room. But as soon as an owner came in with a pet and sat down, Harry would go for the pet owner's lap. They were very different cats in that respect."

When doctors and staff wanted to demonstrate how to give a cat a pill, Frisky always served as the model, being calm and co-operative. "If we tried to demonstrate something using Harry, people would go away with the impression it was impossible. I guess he figured being a demonstration cat wasn't in his contract."

Frisky was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and passed away in 2008, after a mercifully brief illness. "When he died we got a lot of sympathy cards and letters from clients. One lady gave us a framed picture of him, which now hangs in the office. The staff really missed him - when they went in at night and on weekends, he'd always been there. He was a fixture, and now he was gone."

After Frisky died "there was a dramatic change in Harry - he didn't come down to greet people for several weeks.

Then one day he returned to his routine." Was Harry grieving for his friend? "Animals respond to the loss of a companion animal in different ways," said Dr. Laing. "Some hardly appear to notice when another animal is gone; others display personality changes. Harry was certainly a different cat for a while after Frisky died."

All in all Frisky "had a pretty interesting life, with tons of affection," said Dr. Laing. "And his weight loss experience taught us a lot. What we learned with Frisky we applied to other cats trying to lose weight."



Just another day at the office for Frisky

Photo courtesy of Town and Country Animal Hospital

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Champion Guitarist To Launch CD At Local Pub

By Hannelore Volpe

You'll have to hang on to your seats when guitar champion Ewan Dobson hits town Dec. 20.


Ewan will perform at his Stouffville CD launch party hosted by the York Region Fingerstyle Guitar Association (YRFGA) at The Earl of Whitchurch pub on Main Street. His energetic and invigorating style has its roots in his classical training, and the hard rock and heavy metal he played after acquiring his first electric guitar. He has drawn inspiration from many of the music and guitar world's elite, among them Niccolò Paganini, Steve Vai, Yngwie Malmsteen, Don Ross, Leo Kottke and Metallica.

Although he's been winning guitar competitions for some time, Ewan, 28, has had a rapid string of successes this fall. He was champion at the Canadian Fingerstyle Guitar Competition in Kingston, and won in the acoustic category of the 4th Montreal Guitar Grand Prix. His crowning achievement was a third place finish at the 38th International Fingerstyle Guitar Championship in Kansas.

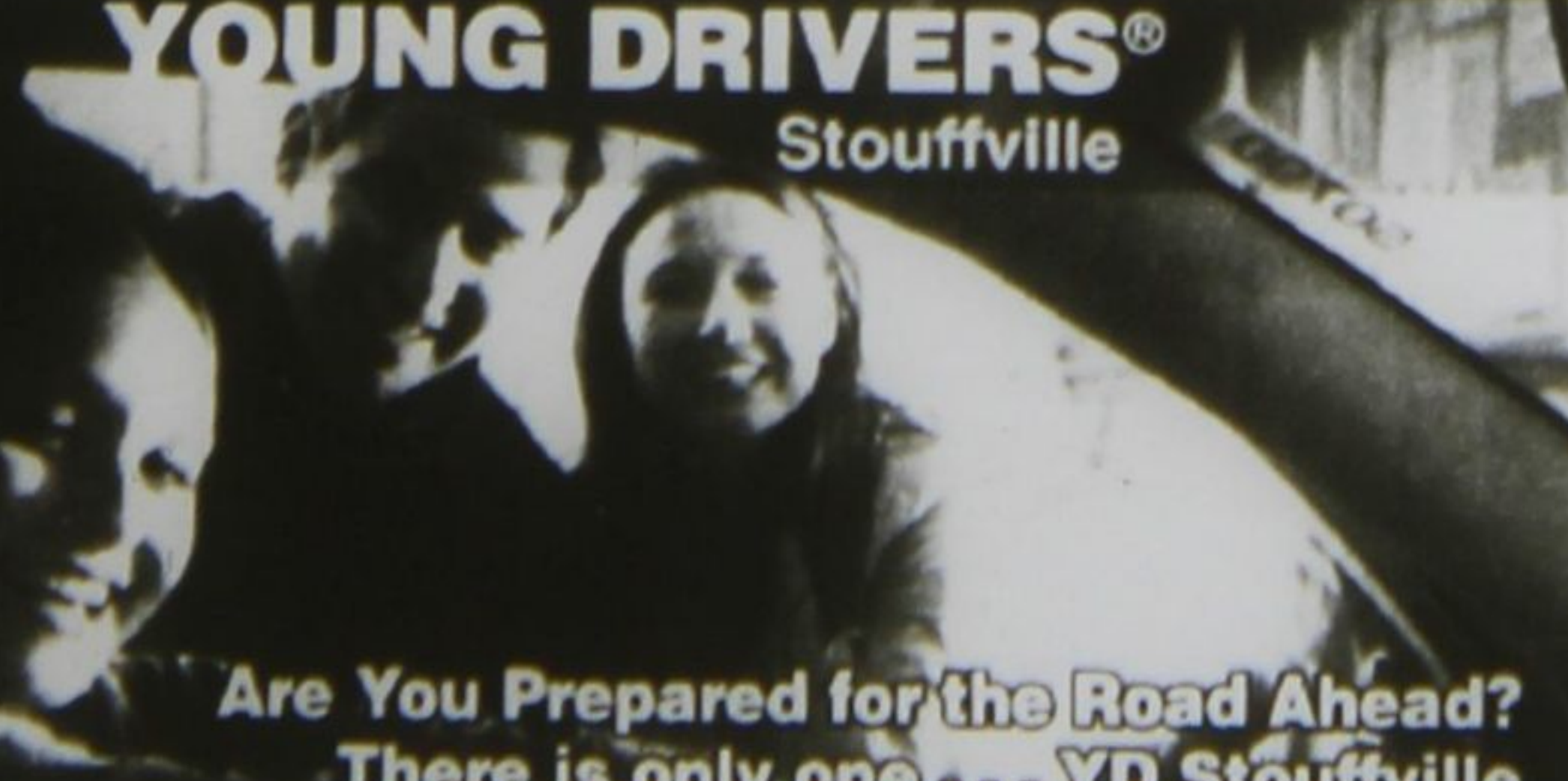
Achieving such a high placement the first time out at what is essentially the Olympics of guitar competition is "very unusual," said YRFGA spokesman Brian O'Sullivan, a Stouffville musician. Ewan also performed during Strawberry Festival and more recently at the Lebovic Centre for Arts and Entertainment - 19 on the Park. His CD on the CandyRat label will be available at the YRFGA's open mic which runs from 1:50 to 5 p.m. Dec. 20.

You'll also be able to enjoy the music of the talented musicians who make up the association. Whether you're a guitarist or a fan, you'll find inspiration in the many styles of music they play, learn about the musicians who inspired them and hear the stories behind their original or chosen music. Everyone is welcome to attend the open mic at The Earl of Whitchurch, either to perform or to listen and enjoy.

You can check out Ewan Dobson's music at myspace.com/ewanguitar or visit the York Region Fingerstyle Guitar Association on Facebook. For more information email brian.osullivan@sympatico.ca.



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