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The Last Feral Cat. Part 1 of 2.

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Cat rescue doesn't mean the same thing to everyone who does it. What I've found over the years is that most folks tend to specialize in the area they feel most comfortable. Some people, like me, will take on a pregnant cat or foster and socialize orphan kittens, while others prefer to do TNR ([trap, neuter, return](#))^[1] of feral cats.

Within those areas are so many other facets. Some people prefer to specialize and only take on blind cats or cats with feline leukemia, while others take on the tremendously difficult task of caring for neonatal kittens (*difficult because easily 40% of any litter of kittens can die even if you do feedings every two hours around-the-clock, keep them warm and clean, do everything you're supposed to do..it's not for the faint of heart*).



©2007 Robin AF Olson. My first attempt at trapping.

I no longer feel like I have to do it all. I can't. I'm not that great at all aspects of rescue and thankfully, I don't have to be because usually if I can't do it, I can find someone who can.

Eight years ago I tried doing TNR but I always felt badly letting the cats go. I trapped a cat in my own yard and was tempted to work on socializing her, but the person I did rescue with told me not to bother, that it would take too long and to let her go. I always regretted listening to her because the cat wasn't aggressive, just scared. I named her Bronte. Sam and I set up a wonderful home for her using our screened in porch as a home base. We got her two heated cat cabins and made sure she was fed and cared for. Bronte had a daughter I named Madison, and years later another cat, Buddy, joined her, but only for a short time. Bronte was the only one who survived more than a year, out of the three cats.



©2007 Robin AF Olson. Bronte.

Nearly two years ago, the idea of doing TNR came up again. I was sitting at my desk when I heard a cat yeowling outside my window. I looked up and saw a black and white cat sitting on the hillside partially hidden by tall weeds. I didn't see Bronte, but I did see this newcomer. My hackles raised. I wanted to protect my girl from this interloper, but he ran off into the woods when he saw me approach the window to get a better look at him. Who was he? Where did he come from? It was very unusual to see a cat outside in my neighborhood.

Sam reported seeing the cat again and again. We put out food for him and sure enough, he began eating comfortably alongside Bronte. Clearly he was no evil-doer and I was glad she had a friend. Winter was coming. We often saw them cuddled together in one of the cat cabins.



©2015 Robin AF Olson. Barry and Bronte have lunch.

We couldn't handle this new cat. He'd run off if we got too close. We weren't even sure he needed our help. I designed a flyer and put one on my neighbor's mailboxes. One contacted me and said she fed him but that it was not her cat and that once he came inside her house and flipped out so she put him back outside. She assumed someone dumped him.

I asked around, called my friends at animal control, posted his photo on Facebook but no one stepped forward to claim him. I figured I'd borrow a trap and deal with the cat some day, but I wasn't sure what I was going to do with him. **Would I give him the chance to come around that Bronte never had?** I didn't have loads of space to foster him in and he was far from a kitten. If he was feral I'd have to let him go back outside and I hated having to do it. I know that feral cats are by definition, wild, and that it's not fair to keep feral cats indoors, but we have coyotes in our yard. Our home is next to a state forest. There are many real dangers here and I didn't want this cat to become a predator's next meal.



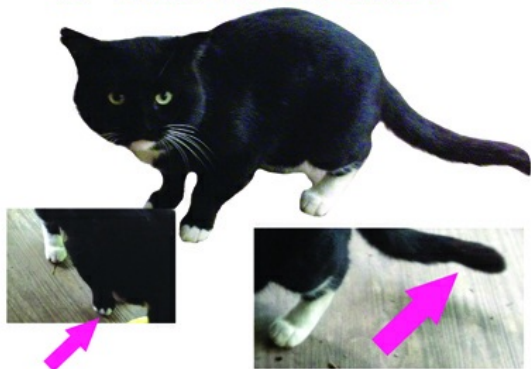
©2015 Robin AF Olson. the DOOD ^[2] and Blitzen taunt Barry.

The following autumn the cat sat outside my office window once again. Blitzen and Dood were sitting on the window ledge staring at the cat. Within seconds I heard something ripping. I looked up and the cat was hanging off the screen window, ripping at it to get at my cats! He put a big hole in the screen (\$100 to fix!) and scared the crap out of all of us. It made me

even more concerned about trapping this cat because if he was that ferocious from outside, how would he behave INSIDE my house?

But my hands were tied. Sam called out to me a few days later. He had just seen Bronte. **She was visibly thin and limping. Something was terribly wrong with her so we put out a trap, hoping we'd be able to get her to our Vet.** She'd been trapped a few times over the years and was trap savvy. I knew we might have to get the help of one of my friends who does a lot of trapping and could use a drop trap, but we were quickly running out of time.

IS THIS YOUR CAT?



This kitty has been coming to our home for a few weeks. We believe it's a boy. He has what looks like a kink in his tail and the toes on his right front paw are white.

Please contact us: info@kittenassociates.org if this is your kitty. Otherwise we will be trapping him and taking him to Animal Control in Newtown so he will be safe.

The trap was set and we heard it slam shut not long after. We had hoped to see Bronte sitting in the trap, but low and behold there was the big black and white cat sitting hunched over in the trap that was barely big enough to hold him. I had to deal with him now, even though my cat Gracie was critically ill and we were doing almost daily vet runs with her, even though Bronte needed help first. We had him, now he needed to be vetted. I called a favor from my friends at [Nutmeg Spay/Neuter Clinic](#) ^[3] and got him booked to be neutered.

Unfortunately, it meant he had to stay in my garage in the trap until he could be taken care of and the fastest I could get it done was in two days because it was a weekend.



©2015 Robin AF Olson. Gotcha!

I didn't get too close to the cat. I changed out the newspapers that lined the trap and gave him fresh food. He wasn't aggressive with me, but I didn't want to find out if he was, either. He was a big cat and he scared me. **His ears were ripped up and he was missing fur on his front right leg, scars from years of fighting, no doubt. I decided to call him**

Barry Lyndon. I don't know why I named him after a truly terrible movie, but I liked the Barry part so it stuck.

We continued to try to trap Bronte, but we never saw her again after Barry was trapped. Sam and I had fed her for so many years, never missing a day. She'd become part of our family and now she was gone, never to return. I hate to think of what became of her. We gave her the best life we could. I yearned to hold her, to tell her we loved her, that we missed her and we'd probably never stop looking for her. That's why I don't do TNR. I'm too much of a softy. I want all the cats to live in my house and be happy. I don't want them to have a difficult life and a sad, maybe very scary ending of that life.

Meanwhile, Barry got neutered. We found out he was about three years old. Thankfully, he hadn't gotten FIV or Feline Leukemia, but I had to believe there were lots of baby Barrys running around the area.



©2015 Robin AF Olson. Barry's home for a grueling 6 weeks.

I wasn't sure what the heck to do so I set up the biggest dog crate I had and made it into Barry's temporary home. I'd assess him while he was confined inside the garage and decide in a few days whether or not I should release him or bring him into the house. He weighed 13 pounds and looked like it was all muscle. His golden eyes blazed at me from inside the crate. I wondered what he was thinking.

I had to feed Barry, but I was scared to open the crate. Would he charge at me? Flip out? Instead he surprised me by coming right up to me, then ate every last bit of food. I didn't try much with him at first, but he was so focused on eating I pet the top of his head. He didn't care. He just wanted a meal.

Fortunately for me I had begun to take a Cat Behavior Counselor certification course through the [HSUS](#) ^[4]. I knew it would help me with Barry, but I didn't know I'd need a lot more help than I thought.

Within the first few days I knew Barry was somewhat friendly. I was confident enough to put my hand into the cage to offer Barry food. He'd spilled the contents of his litter pan and I was trying to brush some of it up with a paper towel. Before I realized I was in trouble, Barry lashed out and bit me, HARD. He bit me so hard my hand was black and blue (*really purple*) for TWO WEEKS. Some how he barely bit into the flesh of my hand. It was a freakish crushing bite.

©2015 Robin AF Olson. How to get bitten.

I asked my instructor for guidance. I was terrified of Barry, though I realized that between his still-surging hormones, being scared and bored in a crate and seeing my hand moving like prey, of course he would bite me. I wanted to believe he didn't mean it. I didn't scold him, but in all honesty, I didn't know if I could give him any more time.

He cried a lot. He wanted out of the crate. I had to crate him for 6 long weeks because the only place I could put him was inside the now famous blue bathroom, where Mia still lived. If I put a fractious cat in with Mia it could be very dangerous for her. Once Barry's hormone level was down (*hence the six week wait*), it would be safer for all of us, but it also meant it would really flat out suck for him. **He was letting me pet him. He wasn't feral. I had to give him a chance.**

During times like this I force myself to look at the big picture. Yes, it was awful to confine Barry for weeks on end, but if I looked at what might be the rest of his life, living in a home, safe, warm, and happy some day, then these weeks would soon be forgotten.

And then Barry bit me again.

part two next...

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Links

[1] <http://www.alleycat.org/resources/why-trap-neuter-return-feral-cats-the-case-for-tnr/>

[2] <https://www.facebook.com/HisRoyalDOODness/>

[3] <http://www.nutmegclinic.org/>

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