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This time it was a nip, not as serious as that first chomp, but it made me recoil in fear. *What did I do to cause this or did Barry have aggression issues?* **Barry was bored.** I felt it in my gut. He needed out of the crate.

When the day finally arrived for him to come inside I was both worried and relieved. First, I had to get him out of the crate and into a cat carrier so I could bring him into my home. I purposely skipped Barry's dinner the night before, thinking if he was hungry enough I could lure him into the cat carrier with food. I was terrified that if he didn't cooperate and I had to handle him that it would end badly for me. But Barry was being Barry. Show him food and Barry will go anywhere you want. I had to give him a quick shove so as to not get his tail stuck in the door of the carrier, but he went right inside. He was too focused on food to mind. *Whew.*

This was it. Time to find out what Barry was made of. Would he continue to be aggressive or would he relax with space to move around and the company of another cat? He'd been friends with Bronte. Surely he and Mia would be friends, too. I prayed that being out of the cage would be what Barry needed to begin to blossom and where I could finally trust him.



©2015 Robin AF Olson. *It made me sad that Barry spent countless hours looking out the lone window in the bathroom. I knew he was safe where he was. He wanted to get outside, but since he wasn't feral I had to give him every chance.*

Barry was a bit bossy with Mia at first, but there was enough room for the cats to have their own space. My instructor urged me to do two, 15-minute play sessions every day with Barry. He loved them and it helped him relax afterwards. **What was so completely charming was how awkward Barry was when he dove after a toy. His body was not built like a gymnast, more like a wrestler. He'd dive after a toy, then *thud* onto the floor. His eyes lit up and he wheezed as he vigorously grabbed at the toy then bit hard into it. Finally, something else was getting bitten besides me.**



©2015 Robin AF Olson. Handsome man.

One night I sat on the floor and encouraged Barry to come over to me. I reached out for him and pulled him onto my lap. He sat there like a brick. His body was heavy and solid. I carefully petted him, worried I would over-stimulate him and cause him to bite again. He sat there quietly, but I was tense. Barry sensed it, too. He got up and jumped onto a small cat condo. I froze since he was towering over me. I spoke to him quietly and reached out to pet him. His mouth opened to take another bite of my hand, but this time I disengaged with him, got up and walked out of the room, closing the door behind me. **He could not do that to me or anyone or I'd never get him adopted. My non-reaction was a message to him that he wasn't going to get what he wanted by biting.**



©2015 Robin AF Olson. Barry and Mia at playtime.

A few months passed and Barry and Mia became friends. I even played with Mia when I had a session with Barry. It helped her come out of her shell a little bit more, too. Barry continued to charm me but I felt terrible he was in such a small space. I cleared off the top of my washing machine and put a cat bed on top of it. He loved hanging out there since it was big enough to hold him, unlike the cat trees that were woefully inadequate. Though I was still a bit on edge, I began to worry less and less that Barry would bite me. **The more time we spent together, the more I saw him as a clown instead of a fearsome beast.**

©2015 Robin AF Olson. Barry & Mia, BFFs.

Barry's biggest change was when I was finally able to move him and Mia into the main foster room. There Barry quickly made friends with Jelly (*who was in a big crate recovering from surgery on his leg*) and his brother, Lolli, who wasn't too thrilled, but eventually accepted the newcomers. I had a large wicker basket that I put on top of a storage container, about a foot off the

ground. I had an old rag rug that I lined the basket with. It became Barry's favorite place to hang out and I often found him there, belly up, snoring softly.



©2016 Robin AF Olson. Barry, the washing machine attendant.

Jelly and Lolli got adopted, giving Barry and Mia plenty of space to stretch out and enjoy life. There are two sunny windows in the room, one that was very large and overlooked the same spot in the front yard where I first saw Barry so many months before. Barry had been up for adoption for awhile, but I didn't get much interest in him. Last week I got an application that looked good, but they have a young daughter. They asked me if Barry really couldn't go to a family with young children because their kids had been around a cranky old cat and knew to be careful AND they were falling in love with Barry's big head and goofy markings (*intact male cats get really big heads. In the northern USA, we call them "apple heads" and in the south they call them "biscuit heads"*).

We discussed Barry in detail and they sounded like a perfect match. Sam and I did a home visit and their home is more windows than walls and is surrounded by the woods. They promised not to let Barry outside and they agreed to give him time to adjust and not overwhelm him.



©2016 Robin AF Olson. Barry and his new family (with Freya).

Nearly a year after I first trapped Barry, he found his forever home. Frankly, I'm in awe. I had no idea we'd ever find something for him, but he'd blossomed and mellowed out so much (*he hasn't bitten me for at least for six months!*) that it shouldn't have surprised anyone that he found a home. I didn't want to admit it, but I'd become very attached to the big lug. He makes me laugh. He talks to me some times. He lays belly up and hugs tight onto his rainbow catnip toy. **He's a far cry from the cat who tried to rip through the screen to get into my house. Now he licks Mia's head and chases her around the room. He lets the just-arrived foster kittens push him out of his food. He's a big, (17 pounds now!), dopey, love bug.**

Living in a home with two parents and their two young kids is a good match for Barry and though I will never know, maybe he had a home like that once long ago. This time he won't lose his home when times get tough, because I'll always have his back. This time he'll be in a place where he's appreciated and cared for and where he's valued.



©2015 Robin AF Olson. Barry in the blue bathroom.

For the first time in almost ten years, Sam and I decided to close off the screened porch so our own cats could finally use it. We haven't seen any cats in our yard over the past year so it was time. Barry may be the last cat I will ever trap. Now I can go back to doing what I do best, and that's caring for kittens and their moms.

I miss you, Barry, but I'm glad I miss you because you're in your forever home than because I didn't give you a chance and you were lost to us as Bronte was. ***Have a wonderful, loved life, big guy. You deserve it.***

And please don't rip up any more window screens.

©2015 Robin AF Olson. A year later, a very mellow fellow with his catnip rainbow.

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