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A Spoonful of Despair. Part 2 of 4.

Thu, 2016-07-21 17:04 — Robin Olson

Twelve years ago I volunteered for a rescue group fostering cats and kittens. I'd already fostered Spencer, Gracie and Petunia, along with a few others when I got a call about 3 "semi-feral" cats needing a foster home. They were in a situation where they were at high risk of being abused and were living outside in the dead of winter. I'd never even seen a feral cat, let alone ever dealt with one before. I was assured they were not wild, but "semi" feral. They were about six months old. I didn't know that generally it's too old to socialize a kitten at that age. I just knew I needed to help.



©2004 Robin AF Olson. My feral friend, Cricket.

I had no idea what I was getting myself into but I agreed. The lady who runs the organization brought the cats over; three black cats, nearly identical save for one who had a little white "locket" on his chest. The other two were all black. How was I going to tell them apart? Did it matter? **They all wanted to KILL ME!**

I named them Boo-Boo, Sophie and Cricket and eventually I was able to tell them apart, but getting them socialized was another story.

I figured I'd be friendly and go slowly with them. There was no information about socializing feral cats online back then. I had to go it on my own. I only fed the cats off a spoon while wearing heavy gardening gloves. I'd let them lick the food, then try to pet them. What an idiot I was, but in a way, not knowing made me less fearful of what could happen to me if I was bitten.



©2005 Robin AF Olson. Boo-boo and Sophie, Cricket's brother and sister.

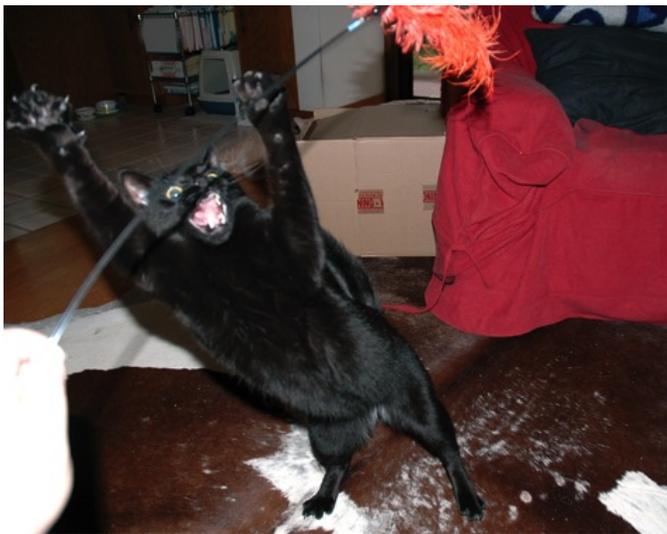
Cricket was all “airplane ears” and hissing. He was never aggressive with me, but man did he not want me near him. Boo-boo was a little bit easier to handle and so was Sophie. If I’d known then what I know now I’d have separated them, but in those days I didn’t even have a crate to house them in, let alone know they’d bond to me better if they couldn’t rely on each other.

Shortly after the cats arrived I attended my first animal rescue fundraiser. I’d never been around people who did rescue before and it really opened my eyes. There I was, surrounded by people who really did rescue, not just a newbie like myself. I asked one of the ladies about “semi feral” cats and she laughed at me. “Kid, there are feral cats and domesticated cats. That’s it. You want these cats to like you, get this really cheap tuna-based cat food and bribe them with it. Works for me.”



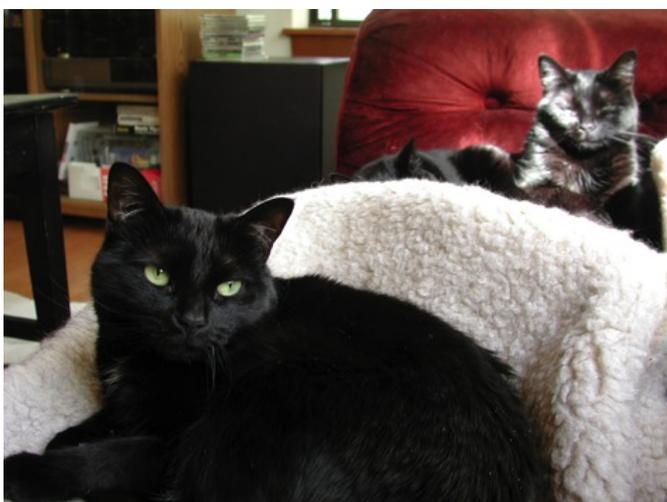
©2005 Robin AF Olson. Slowly but surely Cricket began to trust me.

So I got the cat food and the rest is history. Cricket and his siblings began to trust me. I still remember petting him for the first time without the glove. I was scared but determined to let him bite me, as if my sacrifice would gain his trust. He didn’t bite me. He purred. I tried not to gasp, to cry out with delight. As he leaned into my hand, he gave me the gift of his trust, and I never wanted to betray that again.



©2005 Robin AF Olson. Boo-boo was fearless and loved playing with toys. It was a great way to distract him from being fearful.

His siblings soon opened up and eventually I allowed them to mingle with my own cats. I knew finding them a home would take forever and I had little resources to find a family for them. I eventually left that rescue and began with another. The woman who ran the new rescue found a home for two of the cats. Getting them to that home was a bit of a nightmare, but in the end I was left with Cricket.



©2005 Robin AF Olson. After about 6 months, Cricket and his siblings had free run of the house. This spot in the living room became his until his final days.

At the time I only had a few cats so keeping Cricket wasn't a difficult choice. Cricket never bothered with anyone or caused trouble. He was shy with new people but he found himself a place on the loveseat near the window where I often found him sunning himself. I hoped in time he would feel comfortable trusting us more and hiding less, but I had no idea just how far he would come over the next decade.

Next: the blossoming of a wild child...and just how much Cricket surprised us.

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