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Ruralite Cafe: Published 11/27/08

By Lynn Hotaling



Nicholas' cat story has happy ending

For Thanksgiving, we have a happy tale to tell our readers. It comes to us compliments of Catman shelter volunteer Tom Nicholas of Sylva, who e-mailed us this story he wrote about a cat he terms an "incredible momma."

We offer it here as Tom sent it, with only minor changes to fit newspaper style and space requirements.

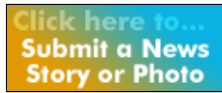
In late July, Tom's neighbor, who lives about a half-mile away up a gravel road best navigated by four-wheel-drive vehicles, discovered a stray cat. An animal lover, Tom's neighbor began feeding the cat by leaving a bowl of food on the driveway. As the cat became more trusting, the bowl of food was moved closer to the house until it was on the porch.



Bravey, Fluffy and Porky will soon be available for adoption at the Catman2 Shelter in Cullowhee. Tom Nicholas of Sylva cared for their mother, Momma Cat, and helped tame the once-feral kittens.

After a few more weeks, the cat became more tame and allowed Tom's neighbors to pet it. It was soon discovered that this skinny, scrawny cat was a very young female that more than likely had kittens hidden away in the nearby woods. Tom and the neighbors searched for the kittens, with the goal of taking the entire family to a local cat shelter. They were unsuccessful, and "Momma Cat" as they called the stray, continued to visit the neighbor's house twice a day for food.

By the time the neighbors planned to leave for their home in Louisiana in mid-August, Momma Cat brought the kittens to a wood pile underneath their deck. Tom and the neighbors tried to catch the kittens, but they ran in terror to the woods. It was decided that Tom would continue to



feed the family; if the kittens could be tamed, they could be adopted.

Tom continued to feed Momma Cat every day, but if the kittens heard or saw him, they would run under the wood pile or into the woods.

When Tom approached the house, he would call for Momma Cat, who would then mysteriously appear on the deck. She was tired and worn out when he first met her – not only was she hunting for herself, but she was nursing her kittens as well, and this drained every bit of energy she had. She would come and check on her kittens, nurse them and introduce them to the solid food. Trying to raise a family of kittens in the woods, watching out for dogs, coyotes, hawks and other predators, was not an easy way of life.

One day Tom and his wife decided to drive by their neighbor's house on their way to town so they could check on Momma Cat and her kittens only to find a shepherd-mix dog running down the driveway and three other dogs under the deck tearing the wood pile apart. When the dogs were gone, Tom couldn't see or hear the kittens, but he did hear a soft meow somewhere up a steep bank next to the house. After crawling up the bank, he discovered Momma Cat about 20 feet up in a tree, afraid to come down.

He made sure she was OK and then placed more food and water out. Though he waited for awhile, the kittens did not appear.

Tom went back to check later, but the food and water hadn't been disturbed and Momma Cat wouldn't come when he called. He continued his trips up to the neighbors' house for the next five days. On the fifth day, after he'd called Momma Cat for 45 minutes with no luck, Tom reluctantly packed up the food and water bowls and headed home.

"Part of me thought if her kittens were gone, then there was no need for Momma Cat to hang around," he writes. "The other part of me knew she had been such a good mother to those kittens – that she must have moved them to a new, safer location. So as I walked the half mile home, I would stop every so often and call Momma Cat, each time with no result."

But the next morning around 4 a.m., Tom's wife woke him up because she thought there was an animal on the porch. Tom turned on the porch light and saw four little faces sitting in one of the chairs. He was amazed to see Momma Cat and her three kittens sitting in that chair.

He put out food, but the kittens ran off of the porch into the dark of night. Momma Cat was looking even more scrawny and thinner than before, but somehow she'd found Tom and brought her entire family. According to Tom, it's a mystery how Momma Cat found him, and it's even more incredible that she was able to bring her entire family.

"I have heard, and I am sure you have heard as well, many stories of dogs and cats finding their way home by way of an incredible journey," Tom writes. "I have yet to learn of a story with Momma Cat's twist to it – finding her way to her caretaker's home and then bringing her family."

Over the next few days Tom and his wife observed that when she wanted her kittens to go somewhere, she would nurse them for a short while, then move toward the place she wanted to go. She would then repeat this process until she reached her goal, and she would use this tactic to bring her kittens from the woods to the porch. The four cats would spend their nights huddled together in a porch chair.

Many times Momma Cat would be totally "zonked out" as she was so tired looking after these kittens, keeping them safe, nursing them, she had little time for her own well being. The kittens were clearly feral and would scatter anytime they would approach. Momma Cat was also trying to wean her kittens, and the kittens were good eaters. Each meal Tom moved their food tray closer and closer until he was able to pet them while they were eating, but they continued to run away at other times.

Both Harold "Catman" Sims and Trish Morgan at the Pet Stop told Tom he would have to cage the kittens to ensure he was their only food source before he could build their trust and

confidence.

While he wasn't happy about caging the kittens, it turned out Harold and Trish were correct. In a few days the kittens would allow Tom to pet them and would eat out of his hand; when he held them, they would purr like little engines.

Once the kittens were tame, Tom determined that "Porky," a brown tabby, is female, while "Bravey," a short-haired orange tabby, and "Fluffy," a long-haired orange tabby, are male.

Momma Cat and her kittens will soon be available for adoption from the Catman2 Shelter in Cullowhee. For information, call 293-0892.

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